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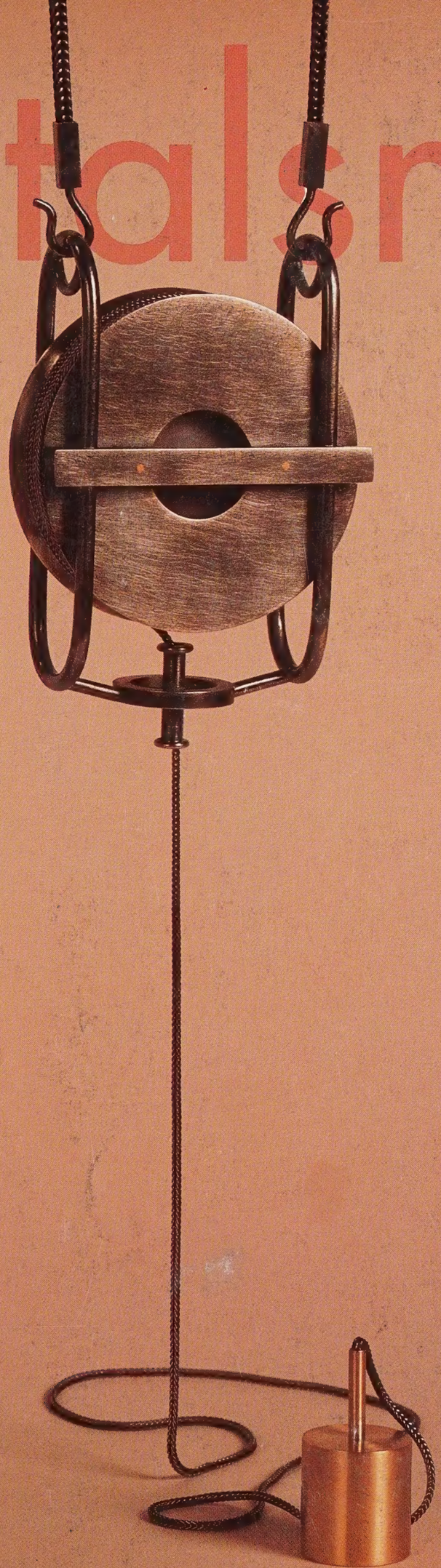

Summer 1992
VOLUME 12
NUMBER 3
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Janice Kluge, *The Voyage*
brass, cast bronze, glass, 1991
See page 26

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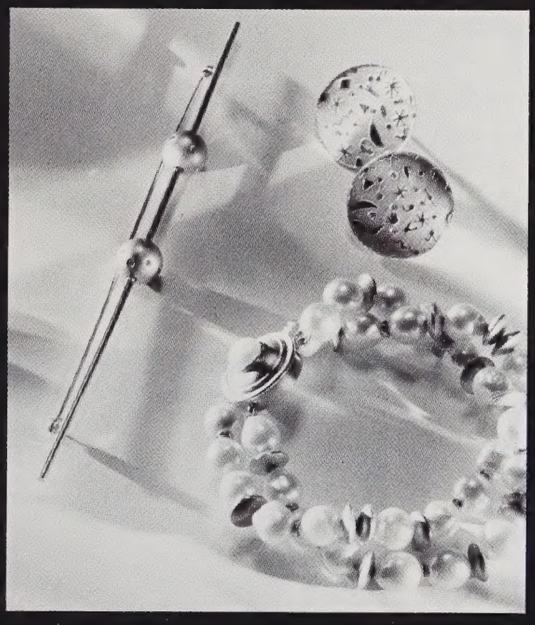

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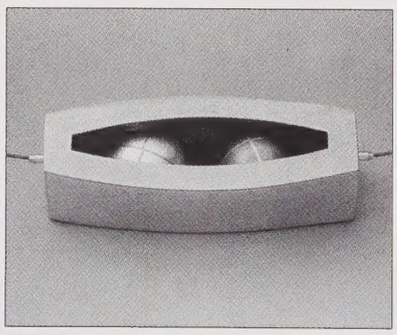

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Metalsmith

Summer 1992

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Above

Gilbert Poillerat, one of a pair of lamp stands, 4 collared rods of iron surmounted by 9 branches of gilded flower-like cusps, c. 1950
Courtesy: Sotheby's, London. See page 31

Cover

Lisa Gralnick, *Anti-Gravity Neckpiece #5*
sterling silver, 14K gold,
2 x 1" x 4½' (unwound), 1992
Photo: Bobby Hansson. See page 14

Editorial

All too often we sign up for lectures, conferences, workshops and courses with juicy-sounding titles, expecting to come away smarter, richer or better looking. Sometimes we get what we want; more often we are disappointed. Such was the case with New York University's First National Symposium on Criticism in the Craftarts, held on April 24 and 25. According to the flyer announcing the program, the crafts would "be considered in relation to: Painting & Sculpture, The Language of Criticism, 20th Century American Art History, The Galleries, The Role of Museums, and The Vocabulary of Materials." I should have known better – this was too much territory to cover in only one-and-a-half days. And since no one had a map, we didn't travel very far. Despite the conference title, there was little discussion of "criticism in the craftarts."

Directed by Dr. Judith Schwartz of NYU's Department of Art and author/critic Rose Slivka, the program comprised six sessions of panel discussions. The participants included gallery owners Ruth Braunstein, Garth Clark, Peter Joseph, Ivan Karp and Bernice Steinbaum; craft artists Richard Artschwager, Robert Brady, Howard BenTré, Mark Burns, Grace Knowlton, Janna Longacre and Winifred Lutz; critics/writers/curators RoseLee Goldberg, Matthew Kangas, Saul Ostrow, John Perreault, Peter Plagens, Rose Slivka, Judd Tully and Amei Wallach; professors David Ecker, Ken Leveson and Judith Schartz; and editors Lois Moran and Howard Yana Shapiro. Keynote speaker at the evening banquet was noted art historian and critic Clement Greenberg. The audience was mostly craftspeople and students, with a sprinkling of editors, writers, critics and curators.

As so often happens in forums like this, those who spoke well – especially those who were amusing – elicited favorable audience response, even when they did not address the topic assigned to their panel. Some panelists discussed what is craft/what is art, and some spoke mostly about themselves. Some panelists were intent on charming the audience, while those from the "fine arts" seemed uninformed or patronizing or even arrogant. A case in point was Saul Ostrow, who read a lengthy prepared speech in a droning voice, pausing in odd places and emphasizing the wrong words. His speech was provocative, even inflammatory, as he dismissed the crafts as unworthy of serious consideration within the art world. His comments should have elicited outrage in more than a few audience members, but most were too numbed by his delivery and relieved when he had finished.

In marked contrast, a few presentations were both thoughtful and enjoyable. John Perreault, curator of the American Craft Museum, asked craftspersons to "forget about painting and sculpture – that is, art with a capital A – for the best way to make art is to try not to make it. Why do people in the crafts want so much to join the art world? What is this compulsion to board a sinking ship?" He was one of the few panelists who presented real opinion about craft criticism. Calling the craft world "largely self-satisfied," he said that criticism "should stir things up. It does not exist simply to glorify or mollify crafts. Craft criticism, like good art criticism, should be explorational. It is neither art nor philosophy. It should be asking questions such as is the craft world Eurocentric?"

One session, although titled "Getting Our Terms Straight: The Language of Criticism," actually discussed the history, role and future of the craft magazines. Conference co-director Schwartz asked the editors on the panel, as well as those in the audience, how many letters they receive, that is, what kind of response do the magazines get from their readership? Surprisingly few, said Michael McTwigan, editor of *American Ceramics*. In an answer that seemed to echo the sentiments of many other editors, McTwigan explained that people seem to believe that magazines are some sort of "castles on the hill." Perhaps they think their letters will be lost among hundreds of others and never be read, let alone printed. All the editors urged craftspeople to become involved in their magazines and take the time to write.

I will dare to follow up on that exhortation. By the next issue of *Metalsmith* you will have a new editor. This is your opportunity to let the editor, editorial advisory board and board of governors know what you want in the magazine. What I have learned over the past few months is that SNAG members can be relied upon to disagree on just about everything, and so it will be with the direction of the magazine. Nevertheless, let your voice be heard. It's your magazine.

I want to add a few lines to thank some special people who have made my interim editorship not only easier but enjoyable: William Baran-Mickle, Don Friedlich, Pete Jagoda, Tim McCreight, Richard Mehl, Bruce Metcalf, Bob Mitchell and Judith Mitchell. Their hard work, excellent counsel and good humor have been a delight. And to everyone else who contributed to these two issues, as well as the upcoming Fall issue, my heartfelt thanks.

— VC

Metalsmith

THE JOURNAL OF THE
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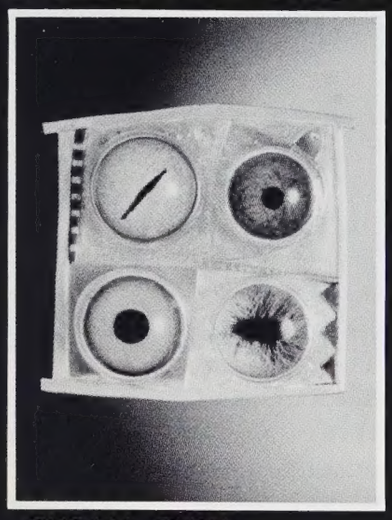

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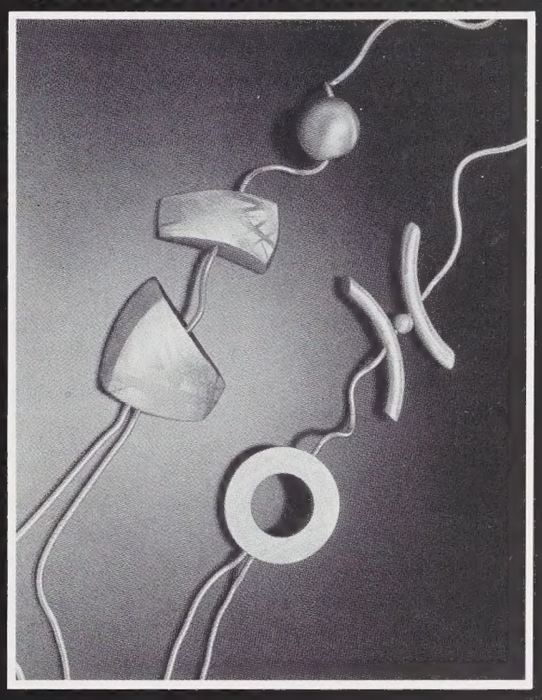

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Letters

Dear Editor:

In Stephen Walker's recent letter, he laments that the article "Recommendations and Remedies" (Fall 91), written by Judy Mitchell and me, was long on recommendations and short on remedies.

In articles based on interviews with others, we don't always find it possible or even appropriate to interject our own perspective, no matter how tempting. In response to Mr. Walker's letter, however, I would like to present my own recommendations and remedies for the consideration of the SNAG membership and board.

SNAG's first priority is *Metalsmith*. The magazine needs to be guided through the difficulties that accompany a change in editorial leadership. *Metalsmith* is SNAG's most valuable resource, and the board must commit itself to maintaining and, if possible, improving the level of critical writing and analysis that marked Sarah Bodine's tenure. The new editor will need the help not only of the board, SNAG's members and the magazine's contributing editors, but also of an active editorial advisory board, which should be reinstated immediately.

After the magazine regains its footing, SNAG should consider adding another 16-page signature composed of both advertising and editorial copy. An additional signature would increase the magazine from 64 to 80 pages and the number of color pages from 16 to 24. At first the extra signature could appear in one issue each year. Once it proves itself financially and editorially viable, the addition could be permanently incorporated.

Histories of craft too often neglect or misunderstand our field. We need to publish our own "metals annual" similar to *The New Glass Review* sponsored by the Corning Museum of Glass and printed by *New Glass Magazine*. The annual would present photographic documentation of the best work the field produces as selected by a jury, some or all of whose members would change each year. The publication would also include essays concerning the work. A metals review can establish standards within the field and increase our visibility outside it. A nominal entry fee could offset some of the cost.

Most of us recognize the need to develop and encourage existing museums' commitment to contemporary jewelry and metal, not unlike the Everson Museum's commitment to ceramics and the Corning Museum's commitment to glass. In "Reactions and Remedies," curator Ken Trapp spoke wistfully of the impressive jewelry collection he could build if he had an annual stipend of only $5,000. SNAG should establish a fund which would provide an annual grant in that amount to a museum for the purpose of purchasing contemporary jewelry and metalwork for its permanent collection. If the museums were invited to compete for the grant each year, we could begin identifying those institutions seriously interested in our field.

We can also help curators by keeping them informed of important developments within the field. A SNAG board member should be given the responsibility of sending curators copies of all significant publications concerning metal and jewelry, including *Metalsmith*.

The glass world makes its collectors a major part of its conferences. SNAG needs to court collectors of jewelry just as aggressively. Soliciting names from SNAG's members and from galleries will enable us to invite our collectors to gatherings pertaining to the field. SNAG should always devote part of its annual conference to collectors. A mini "conference within a conference" featuring talks and events of interest to collectors would free them from having to attend for all four days.

Most of these recommendations are expensive to implement. Where will the money come from? One potential source is the annual conference. GAS and NCECA view their conferences as significant profit-making events. While SNAG should maintain discounted student fees to encourage new and younger members, it could raise other fees.

Individually we can have only limited impact. Together we can make a difference. Artists, galleries and publications need to work in concert.

Some of these ideas may be only dreams. But without dreams plus some tough critical analysis and a willingness to invest in ourselves, we will never significantly improve the credibility of our field.

Donald Friedlich, Cranston, RI

Dear Editor:

I was pleased to see such lively responses to my article (Fall 91) on last year's SNAG Conference. It strikes me as telling that Robert Lee Morris cites the standing ovation that his auto-hagiography received as proof that he is not "corrupt." Indeed, I wrote that I was shocked by the lack of discrimination shown by applauding Morris in equal measure with Alma Eicherman and Albert Paley. That, more than anything, pointed out how much our field lacks the criticality and courage to examine its myths and flaws.

True, we are a wide-ranging field with many legitimate modes of practice – as I made clear by citing a number of excellent "production" jewelers – but anyone who views Morris's way as laudable is letting the glow of the dollar obscure the quality of his work, the intellectual history of our craft and the reality of social conditions (see Susan Kingsley's article on fashion jewelry, Summer 91).

I was, therefore, saddened that Tim McCreight, rather than examining the range of my criticism of Morris, instead chastised me for "citing with disgust" Morris's financial success. That financial success is the result of catering to a fashion world that at virtually every turn drags down the meaning and history of jewelry and metalsmithing, and I see no reason to applaud Morris for that.

Dr. Duke Williams has written to accuse me of not actually attending his talk; this is, of course, untrue. I attended every mortal minute of it and stand behind my assessment. As to Marc Robinson's pennywhistle psychoanalysis of my character, I'm sorry that he finds me and my work "mediocre" – I would have hoped at least for "godawful." He also, it seems, dislikes my byline. A pity; that byline has gotten me quite a few dates.

Keith A. Lewis, Ravenna, OH

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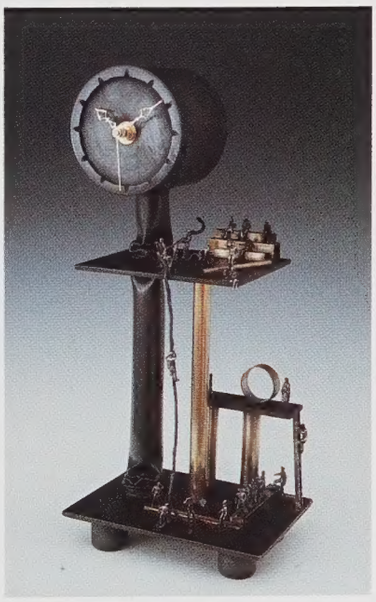

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Point of View

by Mary Douglas

Silver: New Forms and Expressions III

Assuming that the work is cohesive, well designed, well made, of sound concept and has meaning, then what is done to such work by the context of a retail space, a department store of bridal furnishings (trays, flatware, glassware)? Fortunoff is a gift store that markets silver items – the Service Merchandise of Fifth Avenue. Its glitz is announced by the building, a shiny black facade with 10-foot chrome lettering. The interior is also shiny and black, its created darkness punctuated by glowing cases of jewelry. The reflective deception of mirror, chrome and glass is a precursor to the disorientation of the exhibition (and of locating the escalators), spread among three floors of merchandise.

In the storefront window the prize-winning entries are displayed with large mounted Cibachromes of themselves hanging above. Clever, in case we only respond to advertising, the object can be sublimated by its image. Moving to the second floor, we find a cluster of six pedestals among large vitrines of merchandise and gleaming flank assaults of silver trays. The significance of this grouping is not apparent. Up another escalator, we discover two more pedestals at the top in an accent arrangement. The rest of the show is centrally located on this floor – again, blinding sideboards of silverware, paperweights and silver polish on shelves.

This exhibition may be a useful public relations ploy for Fortunoff; maybe they can do without it. But the show certainly does nothing for the work: a very eclectic grouping of forms, of ideas, of interests crammed together in photographs, claustrophobically displayed in retail hell. These pieces should be isolated from one another (do not compare plates and spoons), displayed in a long, narrow room with blank walls, ceiling and floor – absolutely no glass or mirrors nearby.

Let the viewer beware, lest he think there was a curatorial premise. We have mokumé ice buckets, Garfield teapots, Merrill Lynch/Cellini mergers, exquisite candlesticks – metaphor, historical reference, material as meaning, objects ad absurdum, Reed and Barton. Presentation silver, Fabergé eggs, the teapot – all serve as points of departure and refer, among other things, to the historical function of silversmithing as utilitarian and symbolic. In a field this broad, how is the implied innovation of "new forms and expressions" to be realized?

The implied purpose of a sterling silver competition is to focus on product design, forming a liaison between independent artist/craftspeople and industry. But is it the intent of the exhibitors to put their entries into production? The majority of works do not reflect such an interest but seem more concerned with the idiosyncrasy of contemporary craft and its emulation of sculpture. As the latter is not dependent on silver for its expressions, what is the relevance of an exhibition wherein material becomes the sole unifying theme?

More importantly, what is the relevance of any exhibition if there is no equity for the exhibitors? This show lacks a commercial venue (ironically, as it originates in a storefront) with the vested interest of a dealer. Therefore the considerable expense of silver fabrication incurred by the exhibitors is unlikely to be offset through sales. These works are not commissioned (although material costs are partially offset). There is no catalogue with substantiating scholarship and criticism. There are not even show announcements for the exhibitors to send to interested parties (brochures are in the store if you care to drop by). The exhibition's itinerary frames the questions who will see this work and who is going to review it? *Art Forum*? *Southern Living*? *American Craft*? Why didn't SNAG arrange to have this exhibition at a prominent institution such as the American Craft Museum or the Renwick Gallery? Why is SNAG content to showcase this work at a retail gift shop on Fifth Avenue? Are we still selling quilts and baskets out of flatbed trucks at a honey/cider roadstand?

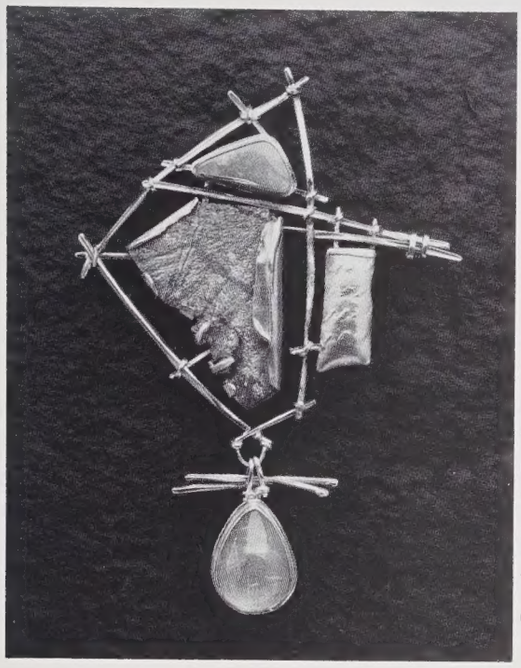
Of course, "we" never were doing the Appalachian roadside scene. Yet this image is representative of the foundation lore of the American Craft Council, which depicts the empowerment of rural craftfolk as they have gained access to an urban market. It is this heritage and the myth of lineage that the contemporary craft artist embraces.

Craft is inherently a conservative field that adheres to the myths of America. In the case of this exhibition, the myth of entrepreneurial spirit is ultimately more important than anything the individual works may be about. Showcasing this particular genre of work at Fortunoff reinforces the desire of craft artists to be seen as self-determining entrepreneurs, presenting their goods to the public and subject to the free-market economy (as if there were such a thing). Never mind that the typical "craftsman" apprenticed to a university art department and shows his wares in a gallery with its specific audience. He might even be employed by a university or other cultural institution. The craft artist is more often located in the intellectual world of ideas rather than in the business community – which is why the viability of hollowware as an individual enterprise is not a factor in this exhibition.

The history of artisanry has a strong hold on the imagination of contemporary craft. Indeed, this exhibition's brochure cover proclaims the presence and authority of the hand, signified by the script lettering with its boldness. This emphasis refers to the skill and talent in handwork, i.e., ability, and its potential value – enterprise. Enterprise for the artisan means production. Therefore the paradigm of the multiple is an oft-cited tenet of contemporary crafts education and is a vestige of colonial crafts production, the artisan as enterprise. This paradigm is followed by Dale Chilhuly, Richard DeVore, Graham Marks and other acclaimed artists who instill production philosophy into unique works of art.

While these artists' galleries follow the standards of SoHo, the typical craft gallery upholds the aesthetics of gift shop display, cramming works together in overabundant shelf and case arrangements. Studio work is recontextualized into the categories of knickknack or housewares, depending on utility. Such is the case with the "New Forms and Expressions III" exhibition (in the brochure photographs, the individual works are grouped in arrangements that reflect some stylist's vision of an eccentric place setting). However, I can't criticize Fortunoff for doing what it does best. SNAG is the real culprit for pursuing this liaison and selling its membership short. Whatever the complicity of the artists in this exhibition with the agendas of SNAG and Fortunoff, their work deserves better treatment. It deserves at least as much respect as the artists had for the competition by submitting to it.

Mary Douglas is an invited participant in the "New Forms and Expressions III" exhibition, which completes its tour at the Walter Anderson Museum of Art, Ocean Springs, MS, August 1 - September 15, 1992.



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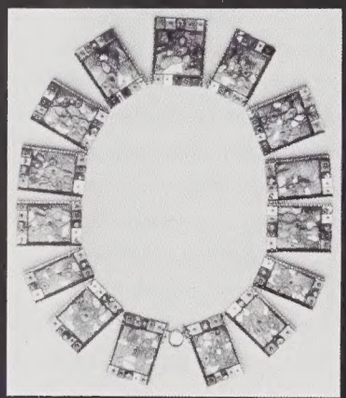

Earl Pardon, Necklace 1991
Silver, Gold, Enamel,
Semi Precious Stones

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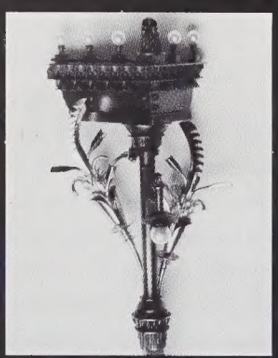
April 15, 1992-May 30, 1992



Richard Mawdsley, Corsage, 1991
Silver, Gold Plate
Size 3¾" × 2¼"
Photo by
David Caras

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Beyond the Bench

by Robert L. Cardinale

Some Thoughts on Pricing

While the marketing genius of Sam Walton may no longer be with us, his basic philosophy of providing the lowest prices possible and doing so with good service and a clean environment has put Walmart on top of the retail merchandise heap and made the chain a Wall Street favorite.

Can the artist learn anything from this example? Not really – or at least not directly. The artist does not provide for the basic needs of the general public. As much as we might like to think that everyone needs art to survive, from a marketing point of view it is simply not true. So offering good-quality works of art, even at the lowest prices, is not going to bring large numbers of active buyers to the galleries. What pricing strategy, then, can the artist use?

There are many methods and individual "formulas" of pricing. For purposes here, I want to share some considerations and guidelines that I have observed and that artists, galleries and dealers have shared with me.

First it's important to ask who buys works of art? The answer is people who place a value on the aesthetic object and who exercise a desire to possess that object. Generally, people who buy art have a certain margin of discretionary income. Although they are certainly not all wealthy, they do have the basic needs of shelter, food and clothing more than adequately met. People who buy art with some frequency and general direction are collectors. Art buyers as a whole are educated and discerning. Discerning does not mean that they have good taste but, rather, that they are able to select what they like and want and to reject the opposite. Art buyers, especially those who purchase works in metal and jewelry, are buying to meet an aesthetic and sometimes a real or perceived need. The jewelry buyer is generally buying from a personal and physical point of view – how the piece looks or fits "on me" rather than how the piece will fit into my collection.

So now we have a general idea of who the audience is and why they buy art, especially artworks in metal or jewelry. Let's consider other factors involved in pricing and how they relate to the buyer. We begin with the material value of the work itself. Arriving at the value of the materials in a work is an easy task which must be done by the artist. It is not, however, terribly relevant to pricing a work of art unless you are dealing with precious metals and gemstones. Also the time spent in producing the work can be recorded or estimated to arrive at the "per hour" cost of a work. (Many artists and galleries totally reject this factor because they consider the idea or content of work an intellectual or emotional entity that has no relation in a quantitative way to the price of the work.) Theoretically, by adding the material cost, the per hour cost and then a percentage of total overhead plus a percentage for profit, you have the wholesale cost of a piece. If the work has some special quality such as a high degree of realism or other type of emotional appeal, an additional amount may be included. The dealer or the gallery must then add their markup, which can range from 50 to 100 percent or more.

After all this has been done, you have the tentative retail price of a work. This tentative price must then be subjected to a psychological or appropriateness test – that is, does the price "fit" the work and the audience that is likely to be exposed to it? Also, is the work priced in the general range of similar works that the gallery or dealer handles? If all this has been done and there is general agreement between the gallery/dealer and the artist, the final price is established. The big question now is will the work sell?

While these are some fundamental and realistic considerations, most artists are not as interested in the basics of retail pricing as they are in creating a price structure for their own work that will make them independent of the logistics of normal marketing. They are interested in raising their prices as high as possible and still have the work sell.

To do this, the following criteria must be met:

1. *The quality of the work must be truly unique and outstanding – and judged to be so by the audience that the artist and the gallery/dealer are addressing.*

It is not enough for the work simply to be excellent. It must strike that area of response in the art-buying audience that makes it virtually irresistible. A lot of excellent artwork is not financially successful, and unfortunately, some works that are far from excellent sell extremely well.

2. *The audience for the work must be addressed and educated.*

Not only must the audience become aware of and encounter the work, but it must feel and understand the importance of the work, whether that importance be historical, technical, formal or expressive or some complex combination of factors.

3. *The artwork and the artist must be appropriately marketed and promoted.*

This may be the major responsibility of the gallery or dealer, but it is also heavily dependent upon how artists present themselves and their work. The direction and development of an artist's career can be a major factor in attracting buyers and turning them into collectors of that artist's work. And having a number of collectors regularly buying one's work is a worthwhile goal.

Robert L. Cardinale is a writer living in Santa Fe, NM.

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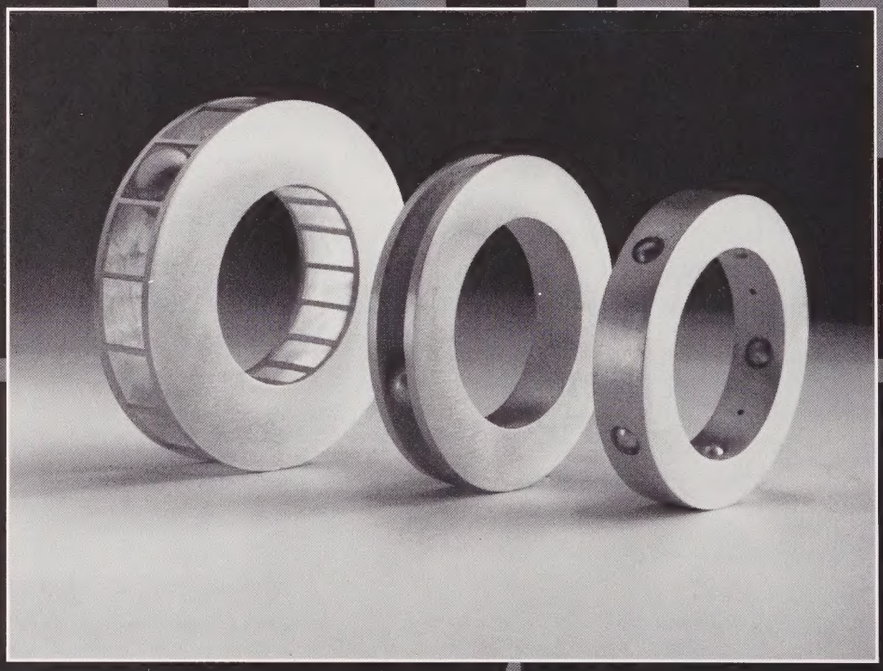

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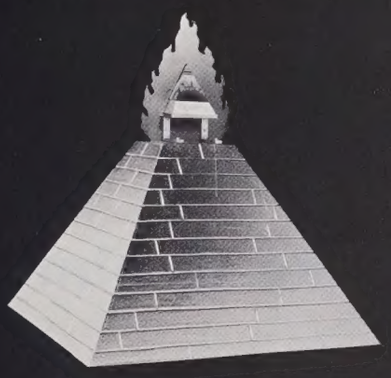

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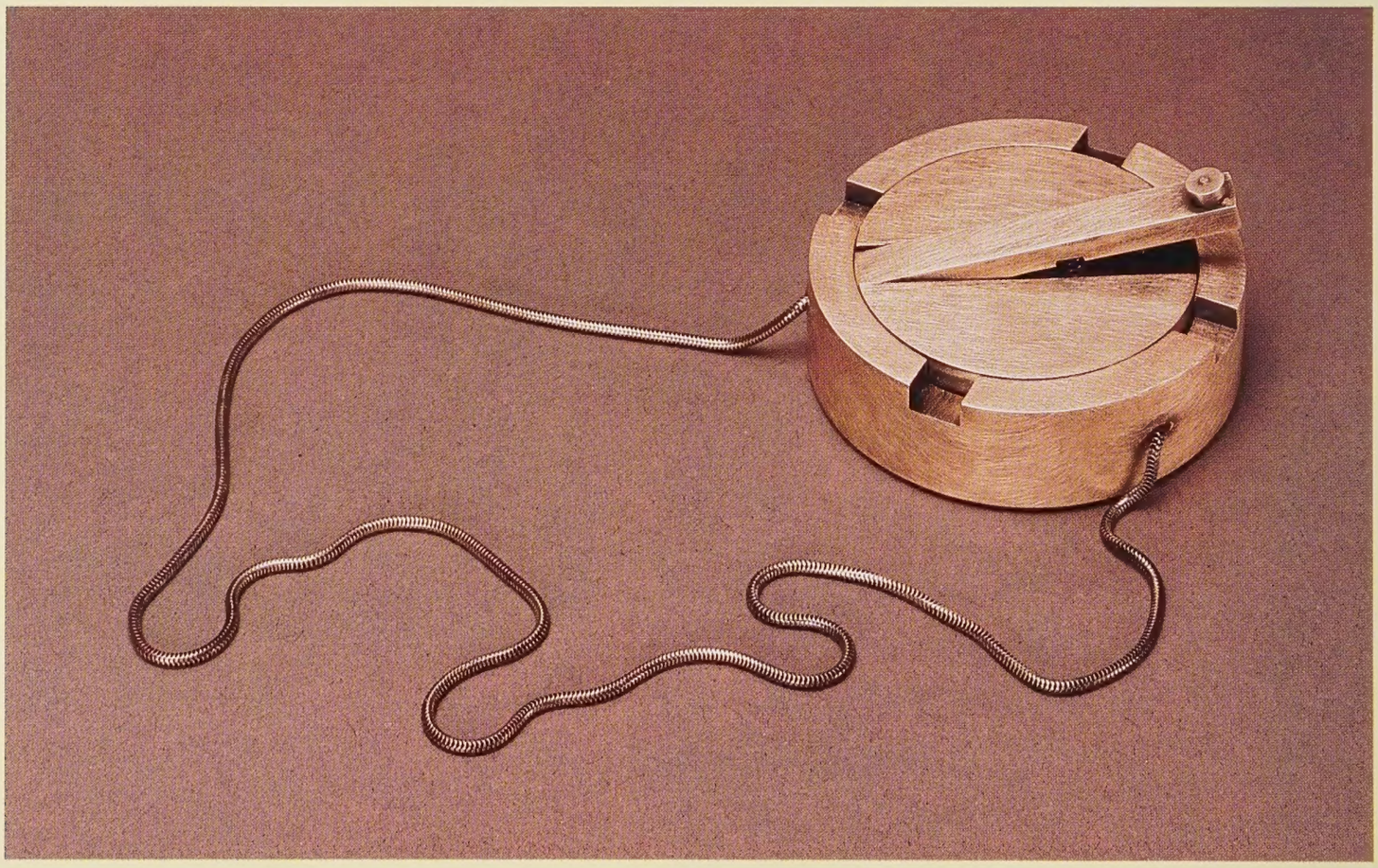


∧ ***Wind-Up Neckpiece***
sterling silver, 2½ d. x 1", 1991
(unwinds to adjust length)
Photo: Bobby Hansson

> ***Brooch***
18K gold, 1⅜ x 1⅜ x ¼", 1989
Photo: James Beards

by Roger Kuhn

Lisa Gralnick makes jewelry of rare power from imagined artifacts of our own time. Its extraordinary impact derives from her sure compositional eye and her success in focusing our attention on forms which, in an important sense, epitomize how we live – forms we've often seen but rarely noted, forms embedded in our subconscious. She shows us fragments, simplified and ordered, which call to mind bits of machinery, space objects, structural elements – or perhaps a gyroscope, a surveyor's plumb line, a camera rewind crank. As she transforms them, they become objects of beauty, objects to contemplate as well as to wear.

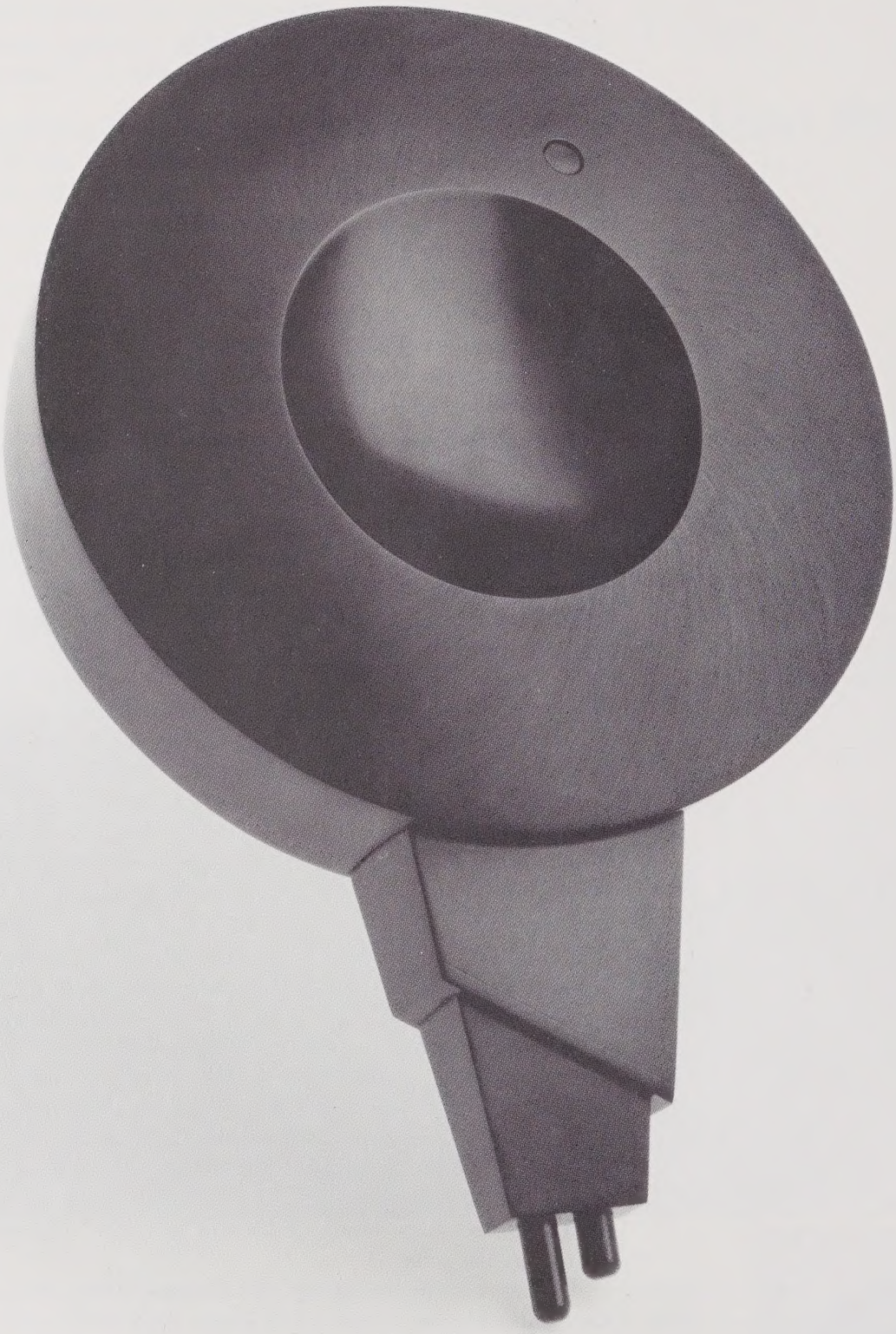
Creativity and logic join together in Gralnick and emerge in her work. Math was her strongest subject in high school. She says she took after her father, a dentist with a head for logic and a professional concern for precision. But her real interests lay elsewhere: in drawing, playing the violin, and "making things." It was at a community center jewelry course that she discovered metal. "In the actual processes of metalsmithing," she says, "I found the perfect merger – a medium that demanded very precise, logical kinds of skills and thinking and at the same time provided a creative outlet."

For her undergraduate work, Gralnick chose Kent State University because it had a strong metals program and because she admired the work of Mary Ann Scherr, which combined both science and art. She took the usual array of classes in fine art and the crafts, but at the same time she enrolled in Kent's Honors College and plunged into courses in literature and physics. She avidly read the great writers, from Proust to Dostoevsky to Thomas Mann. Literature became a principal source of inspiration; literary references infused her jewelry. In the art department, Mel Someroski taught her to love enamel and took a great interest in her reading. "He was everything a teacher should be," she says, "and the first real artist I had exposure to."

Gralnick earned her BFA from Kent State in 1977, then went to graduate school at SUNY/New Paltz. There, she recalls, "my metals education really began." She studied with two teachers who were polar opposites but for her were the perfect complement. Kurt Matzdorf, renowned for his hollowware and commemorative pieces, insisted on a rigorous, classical training in the traditional arts of silversmithing. Robert Ebendorf, the contemporary man and innovative artist, taught his students to follow their muse. Matzdorf urged his students to work figuratively, drawing imagery from nature. Ebendorf supported Gralnick's search for "an abstract language which had nothing to do with literal references." She acknowledges the influence of both teachers in the development of her own work, which eventually came to combine both referential and abstract elements.

At New Paltz, Gralnick began to explore a subject which had fascinated her for years: the ways in which objects of art have functioned in the cultures which have produced them. As a child visiting New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art with her parents, she had always headed first for the room with the African masks and fetishes. Later she began to wonder how these ritual art objects were able to bypass her logical, intellectual self and appeal so strongly at a "gut level," as she puts it. She thought about the mediating role art played in these indigenous societies – how people chose art objects in their effort to control or placate the unseen forces and spirits which they believed determined their destinies. In her jewelry Gralnick began to draw on forms and ideas derived from these magic-bearing artifacts of "primitive" cultures, using precious metals with enamel for color.

After receiving her MFA in 1980, Gralnick spent a year teaching enameling at Kent State and a year as head of the jewelry department at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax. By 1983, during her stay in Canada, she had become dissatisfied with her jewelry. The objects from which she derived her ideas performed a valid function in the societies in which they were created, mediating between people and the occult world around them, but Gralnick had come to realize that if her pieces were to "function in the same way in our own society, I had to search for forms more relevant to my own time." The way in which she ultimately resolved her search could hardly have been more unexpected.



∧ *Brooch*
black acrylic, 7 x 4 x 1½", 1988
Photo: George Erml
Collection: Daphne Farago

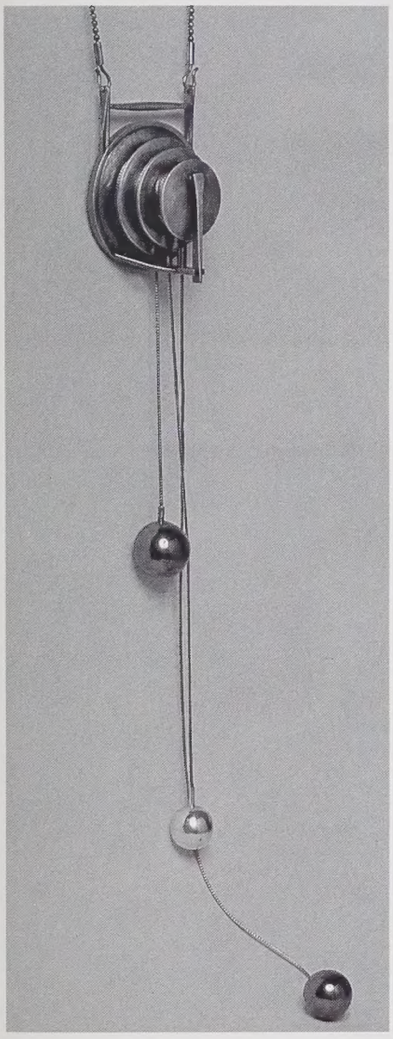
Some months before her departure for Halifax, while driving along a country road in upstate New York, Gralnick had stumbled quite by chance upon a structure which was truly bizarre: a house whose almost windowless exterior was made entirely of black rubber. It appeared to her dark, ominous yet compelling, and she found herself returning to visit it again and again. In Nova Scotia she encountered a similarly unsettling object: the black hulk of an abandoned submarine, rusting behind a barbed wire fence in the Halifax harbor. She remembers going to the harbor often late at night to stare at its "huge, black, threatening, inaccessible-looking form."

Gralnick's mood during this period was increasingly troubled, her view of the world increasingly dark, and these two images seemed somehow to relate to her. Back in New Paltz, they continued to haunt her studio, but she could not find a way to deal with them in her art. Then one evening as she sat listening to a Wagner recording on her stereo, something came loose from the wall and landed on the record, shattering it to bits. Startled at first, Gralnick studied the fragments and then, almost without realizing what she was up to, began to assemble them with glue and build a house. For weeks this strange object made of record shards lay on her bench and kept demanding her attention, until one day, quite without premeditation, she stopped her work and began clearing her studio of all her precious raw materials. The following day she bought a supply of black acrylic sheet and began to teach herself how to work it.

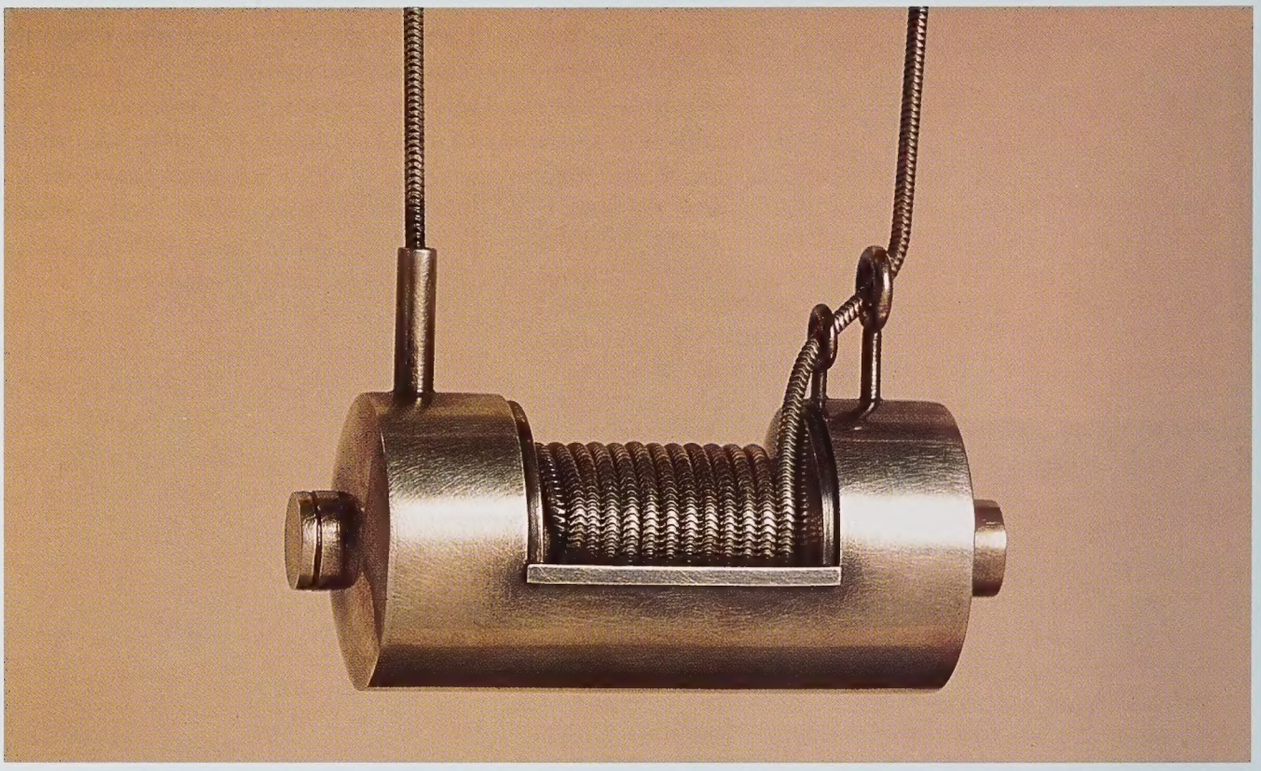
Such was the origin of the black acrylic jewelry which was the subject of her first major solo exhibitions: at VO Galerie in Washington, DC (1987), Galerie RA in Amsterdam (1988), and CDK Gallery in New York City (1989). This new work was the very antithesis of what had preceded it. Instead of gold, silver and enamel, the sumptuous traditional materials of jewelry, she now worked in that quintessentially cheap contemporary substance – plastic. Instead of delicate, elaborate structures, her new forms were bulky and stark. She rejected color in favor of nonreflective black matte surfaces, which focused attention solely on the form without distraction. The forms themselves were gloomily threatening: houses without doors, tombstone shapes, and shapes suggesting missiles and submarines. Each had a tiny opening of glass, a window into some mysterious, inaccessible interior space, to be filled, perhaps, by the viewer's darkest imaginings. Gralnick describes these pieces as "at once intimidating and uplifting;" she called them her "Rubber Houses."

In time the pieces she was making began to be less ominous. They now referred to objects from everyday life – gears, switches, oven dials, car parts – things we use to exert control over our lives. They were, in fact, contemporary analogs of the ritual objects of "primitive" cultures which had inspired Gralnick's earlier work, the work abandoned as unsuited to our own society. Gralnick's hope was that by taking contemporary objects, turning them into abstract compositions, and putting them close to the body, these forms would resonate subliminally and communicate to the subconscious. Though they were large, they were lightweight and eminently wearable. Their exquisite craftsmanship and soft-seeming surfaces made them precious and desirable.

Three years ago Gralnick's work took another dramatic turn, not because she thought she had exhausted the possibilities of black acrylic, but because she found that she missed the feel of working with metal. She was curious to discover what she would make in gold after five years of working with plastic. With some fellowship money from the NEA and the New York Foundation for the Arts, advances from a few of her collectors, and her own savings, she splurged on $15,000 worth of 18K gold. She set out to work the gold with the same attitude she had used in approaching the acrylic, and the result was a series of brooches which again suggested fragments from industry and space. They are simple in composition but exquisite in detail. The craftsmanship is so impeccable as to seem effortless; one senses that if these objects were enlarged to industrial scale, there would still be no visible imperfection. With these brooches, Gralnick succeeded in giving gold an industrial look, as previously she had lent preciousness to plastic.



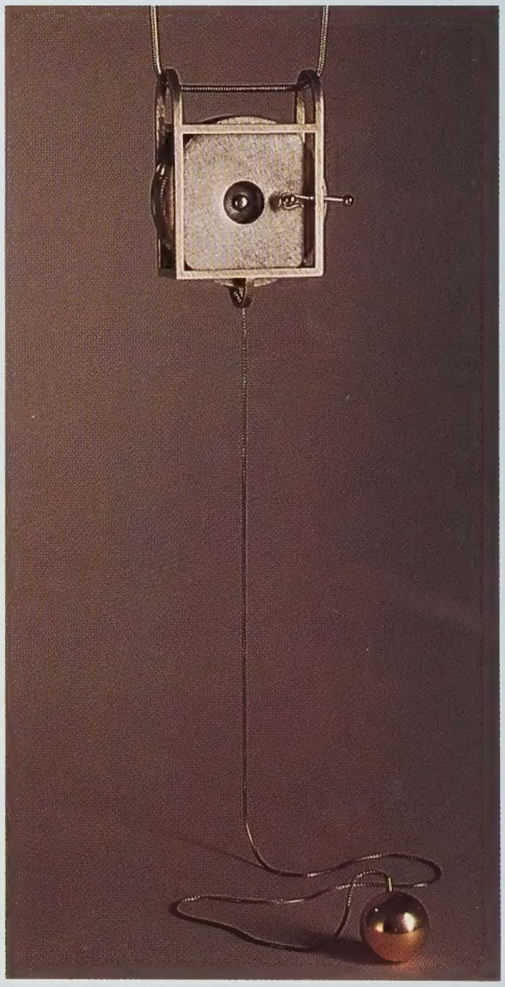
∧ ***Anti-Gravity Neckpiece #4***
sterling silver, 14K gold
2 x 1 x 4½" (unwound), 1991
Photo: Bobby Hansson



∧ *Reel Necklace*
sterling silver, fabricated
4 x 1" d. x any length, 1992
Collection: Sandra Grotta

> *Anti-Gravity Neckpiece #2*
sterling silver, 14K gold
2½ x 1" x 4' (unwound), 1991

Photos: Bobby Hansson



In the gold brooches, as in the black ones which preceded them, Gralnick had expressed her continuing fascination with things mechanical. She has always found beauty in the forms of simple devices, in the way they follow nature's laws and in the way they enable us to use those laws to fill our needs. The latest development in her constantly evolving work was shown at her most recent one-person exhibit, at Jewelerswerk Galerie in Washington, DC, last fall.

Her newest pieces are pendants and neckpieces which explore the visual potential of simple mechanisms – spools, pulleys and cranks. The *Anti-Gravity Neckpieces,* for example, have small spheres or cylinders suspended from them which can be raised or lowered mechanically, enabling the wearer to choose the length at which they will be worn, from waist to knee. The forms are without adornment, stripped to their essence; every visual element has a mechanical function. They are mostly of silver, but like the black acrylics, their surfaces are finished in such a way that no reflection distracts attention from the forms themselves. Gralnick's goal is to bring the wearer into an intimate relationship with some of the essential mechanisms around us, and to force both wearer and viewer to observe for the first time the beauty which resides in their forms and in their functioning.

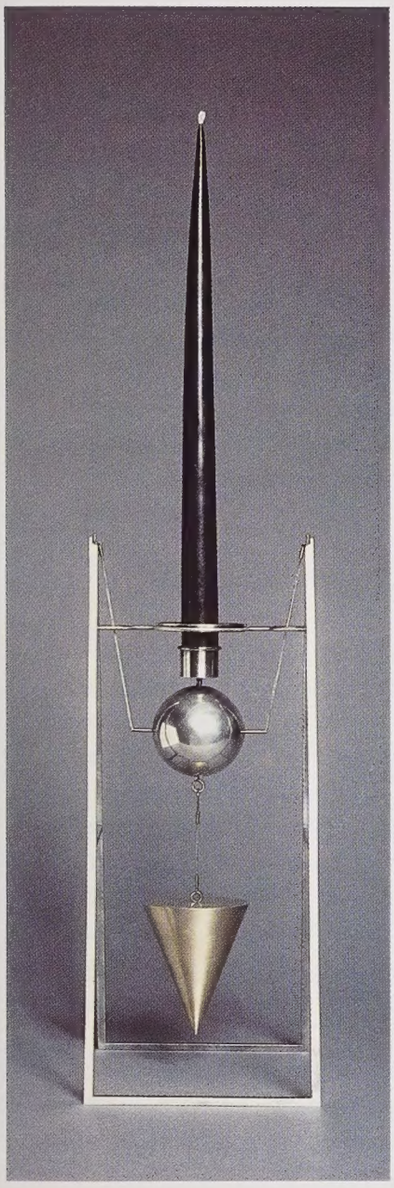
Gralnick's jewelry has found a growing clientele, who buy her work at the craft shows where she still exhibits, from galleries here and in Europe and from her studio near New Paltz. After several years of teaching at the 92nd Street Y in New York City, she was recently appointed coordinator of the metals department at the Parsons School of Design, a position which now absorbs a large share of her time and energy. Although the job has left her less time to work, it has also lessened the pressure to produce, and at the present she finds this welcome. Her thinking is once again in transition, and she relishes a period of pondering and experimenting at her bench.

She has only an inkling of where this might take her, but the chances are that something will develop out of her long fascination with the natural order which surrounds us. Over the years she has read books and taken courses in theoretical physics and cosmology, courses which invite speculation about the physical universe, its origins and laws. She studies drawings of early scientific instruments, and she derives pleasure, both visual and visceral, from understanding how they work. She sees theoretical physics as the link between science and art: both, she says, are "concerned with the nature of things."

So at her bench these days, Gralnick makes crude models of scientific experiments and instruments. Her current favorite is a model of the expanding universe, constructed of rubber bands and paper clips. She tries to reduce complex concepts to simple devices which illustrate nature's workings. She wants to make things which will convey to others her own sense of wonder at "how things work."

Gralnick has been asked why she bothers with jewelry, why she doesn't make sculpture apart from the body. Her response is, typically, firm and considered. She is committed to jewelry, she says, and to the centuries-old goldsmithing tradition. She sees her work as a continuation of that tradition – its rigorous demands, its "precise and respectful approach to working with materials," its dedicated pursuit of lasting aesthetic value, and the ideal that preciousness should inhere in the object itself, not in what it's made of. She firmly rejects the notion often implied in the question, the notion that jewelry is somehow a lesser art than sculpture. If she makes objects not intended to be worn – as she has done and may well do again – she wants them judged by the same standards as her jewelry. And she wants her jewelry viewed with the same seriousness as her sculpture.

Whether on or off the body, Gralnick's work seeks to connect the universe without and the universe within. She says, "It is that connection that I'm still looking for in my work and that threads through all the different stylistic changes that I've made." Her jewelry combines – and miraculously resolves – an appeal to both logic and intuition, science and aesthetics, intellect and emotion. Therein lies its unique power.



A ***Candleholder***
sterling silver, bronze
10 x 10 x 18" (without candle), 1991
Photo: Bobby Hansson

Roger Kuhn makes jewelry and occasionally writes on craft from his home in Bethesda, MD.

WELDING ALUMINUM FOR SUCCESSFUL ANODIZING

By Matthew Hollern

THIS ARTICLE INCLUDES DESCRIPTIONS OF DANGEROUS ACTIVITIES. THESE DESCRIPTIONS ARE NOT TO BE DEEMED INSTRUCTION, ANY INFERENCE TO THE CONTRARY BEING HEREBY SPECIFICALLY DENIED.

Introduction

Aluminum has been researched since the late eighteenth century, when the French chemist Antoine Lavoisier theorized that the metal which had been known as "alumine" was actually an oxide of a metal with a strong affinity for oxygen. Aluminum ore was first discovered at Les Baux, France, and was therefore named bauxite. In 1854 a Frenchman named Henri Sainte Claire Deville developed a chemical means to extract aluminum from ore to obtain a pure metal. Because of its rarity, refined aluminum was more precious than gold and was exhibited at the Paris Exhibition of 1855 next to the British Crown Jewels. It was not until 1886 that the American Charles Martin Hall, studying at Oberlin College in Ohio, made it possible to produce aluminum efficiently, using an electrolytic process. Eventually the material would be exploited by industry in automobiles, aircraft, utensils and electrical equipment.

Aluminum has been used in jewelry and metalsmithing because of its light weight and capacity for coloration through anodizing. Artists have exploited the material's properties in exciting, colorful, innovative works for many years through methods of cold joining. Hot joining methods, however, have not been employed to any extent.

My work began in 1989, with the support of a SNAG research grant. I proposed to develop a means to weld aluminum for successful anodizing, to create an object whose seams would not appear during the anodizing process, and to do so in an affordable package. My experience with pewter fabrication helped me to approach aluminum in an unconventional way. Pewter allows the fabrication of objects through fusing, which results in a visually seamless form that is free from any signs of the fabrication process. This type of fabrication served as the model for my research. In theory, the use of an aluminum filler material of an alloy similar to that of the component parts would create an invisible weld and provide consistent color anodizing. Tungsten inert gas (TIG) welding has proven effective for high-quality welds but requires equipment that is often too expensive for the individual and many institutions. Aluminum solders contain so many other metals that color matching the seam and base metal before or after anodizing is impossible.

The difficulties in welding aluminum have always been the tenacious oxide layer and aluminum's propensity to conduct heat. Successful welding would require freeing the aluminum of the oxide skin, reaching the weld temperature locally, and welding without the reintroduction of oxygen.

Welding

The first of three methods that I applied, flameless torch inert gas welding, was unsuccessful but provided valuable insight into the problems that had always made aluminum welding difficult. The flameless torch is a ferrous alloy filament shielded in a quartz tube. A variable electric power supply is used to heat the filament, which then superheats the flow of inert gas through the tube to temperatures in excess of 2000° F (1100° C). The flameless torch, which was provided by GTE/Sylvania, appeared to be both affordable and applicable to the technology and method I proposed. A second model of the torch, with a fused alumina shield, a smaller focused orifice and a tungsten filament, was also provided. It is capable of temperatures of 1800° F (1000° C) at the tip, but temperatures drop off very quickly with any distance from the orifice. A dial controller provides variable power to coincide with the volume of the gas flow. A safety switch is used to isolate and ground the operation.

I built a work space from a salvaged galvanized steel box to create an oxygen-free, inert environment. Slitted rubber armholes allowed freedom of movement without the re-entrance of oxygen. The viewing window from a stove door was salvaged to provide safe, inexpensive, heat-resistant glass. The flow of nitrogen from the flameless torch would displace any available oxygen, venting it out the small chimney of the box. This created a positive inert atmosphere in which the aluminum and filler material could be cleaned both chemically with caustic soda and mechanically with abrasives. In theory, there would be no opportunity for oxidation to recur. Once stripped, the aluminum would melt locally and flow freely together, like pewter.

Unfortunately, my theory did not hold up in practice. Although the environment was oxygen-free to the point of putting out a candle, the aluminum still acquired an oxide layer, on both the filler and the components. Furthermore, because aluminum has such a great capacity for dispersing heat, it took full power with a forceful gas stream to reach the welding temperature. When it did melt, it was not localized enough to be acceptable. The blast of superheated nitrogen tended to tear and blow away the molten material, making joining impossible. Fluxes were considered as a means to degrade the oxide layer, but heat dispersion would remain a problem. With a gas stream of 1700° F (900° C), a great deal of heat radiated away from the tool, which made extended periods of welding in the closed environment very uncomfortable for the hands.

This portion of my research illustrated the two major hindrances in joining aluminum: omnipresent oxidation and heat dispersion. At this point I realized that it was not necessary for me to be an inventor. Rather, I could turn to existing technology with added consideration for the anodizing process. Aluminum welding technology dates from early in this century. Torch welding became more and more refined, only to be overshadowed by heli-arc welding. Oxy-fuel torch welding provided X-ray quality welds for the aircraft industry during World War II. A welder whose grandfather had been trained in torch welding quickly brought me up to speed. Reviving this technology would make the process affordable to almost anyone working in the field. It turned out to be the most successful and reliable welding method of the three that I attempted.

Welding aluminum for successful anodizing could be assured through attention to four essential considerations:

- Aluminum alloy and corresponding filler material alloy
- Cleaners and fluxes
- Flame adjustment and welding procedure
- Precleaning process for anodizing

The selection of the alloy used for the fabrication was the most important factor. Aluminum alloys are designated by a four-digit number, with each new first digit being called a series, as in 1000 series, 2000 series, up through 8000 series. The aluminum alloy and temper designation system is nationally registered and universal throughout industry. Alloy number 1100, a "commercial pure" aluminum, was most consistent for quality color-matched welds. The 1100 alloy also provided the most brilliant colors. Alloy number 3003 also yielded good results. Number 6061 is a magnesium-silicon alloy that combines machinability with good color quality in anodizing.

Wrought aluminum sheet is frequently labeled with a gauge number, alloy number and temper designation. For torch welding, 18-, 16- and 14-gauge sheet were most appropriate. Twenty-gauge and above were possible but unnecessary because the material's weight was not often a factor. Eighteen-gauge and below provided adequate thickness to prevent slumping and allowed a less accelerated welding travel speed. The temper designation did not appear to be a significant factor in coloring. It did, however, need to be considered for the fabrication method. A moderate to hard designation would be appropriate for direct sheet fabrication, for durability and for resilience. Dead soft aluminum would be ideal for spinning, die forming, raising and forging.

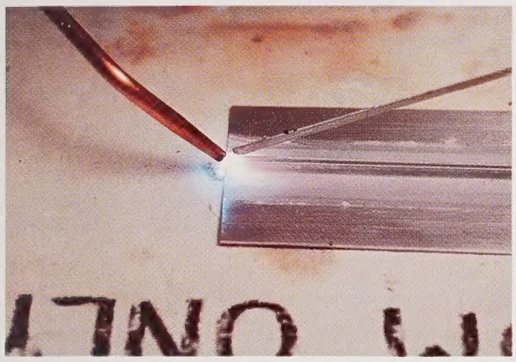
After the alloy was selected, a filler material designated for color match had to be chosen. A publication by the Aluminum Association entitled *Welding Aluminum*[1] was an endless source of technical information and suggestions. It provided the essentials on alloys and their characteristics, joining methods, filler materials, preparations for joining, all types of welding, safe practices and supplementary readings. I tested a number of filler materials. My experience in fusing pewter led me to believe that the ideal filler would be a portion of the parent metal itself. A long strip of the original material would provide a filler rod identically matched with the alloy of the components. I had better results, however, with commercial filler rods, which often include about 5% silicon. This lowers the material's viscosity and allows a smoother flowing joint. Filler rod 1100 was suggested for alloys 1100 and 3003. Filler rod 5654 was recommended for alloy 6061 but seemed to be unavailable. Rather than commit to a material so difficult to locate, I substituted the second choice, filler 5356.

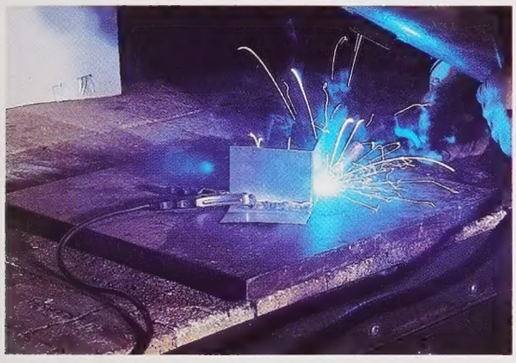
[1]Published by American Welding Society, 2501 NW 7th St., Miami, FL 33125.

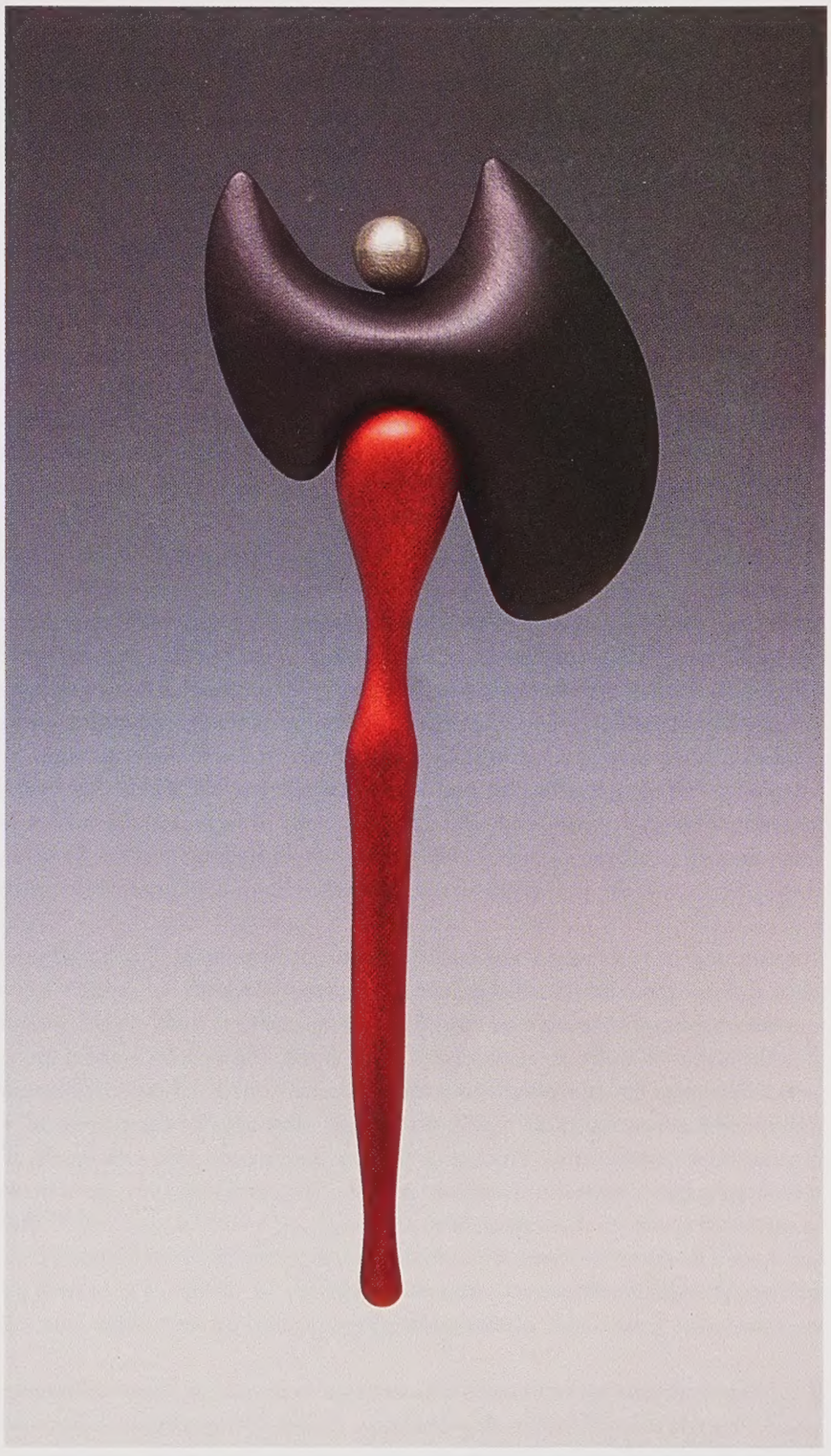
The cleaning of the materials was important to the consistency of the seam and the makeup of the bead. Preparing to weld was very similar to silver soldering in that each component and filler rod needed to be thoroughly cleaned. Once the aluminum had been scrubbed to a white scratched finish, it was chemically stripped with a product designed for pre-weld cleaning, which was brushed on, left to stand for 2 minutes, and rinsed under cold water. This combination of mechanical and chemical cleaning assured the greatest reduction of the oxide layer. All materials, components and fillers were put through this cleaning process just prior to welding and then were immediately fluxed.

Early on it became evident that the flux was the most important and most hazardous component in the process. It was a very active participant in the procedure through its ability to degrade the aluminum oxide skin and allow penetration of the filler material. Active or aggressive fluxes are fluoride and chloride based. Sources of these hazardous materials always furnish a material safety data sheet (MSDS). In this case, the hazards include skin, nasal and respiratory irritation; osseous fluorosis; increased radiographic density of the bones; mottling of teeth; neuromuscular effects and other hazardous results. It was imperative that these materials be used with a respirator and the filters designated for these hazards. The fluxes came in powder form and were most effectively applied when mixed with water or alcohol. The milky slurry of flux was applied on and around the joint to provide ample local protection and "activity." The filler rod was also fluxed to degrade the oxide layer and allow a smoother melt.

To provide the necessary intense localized heat, an oxyacetylene torch was selected. A full-sized torch was found to be slightly cumbersome, but a mid-sized torch with a 0 or 00 tip provided a full range of flame sizes with great freedom of movement. I also tested the Little Torch, a compact, portable and affordable oxyacetylene system. It was the most maneuverable and easily adjusted torch and represented an affordable means to weld aluminum with great precision.







Top to bottom

"Flameless torch" used to superheat inert gas

Oxyacetylene torch welding

Metal inert gas (MIG) welding

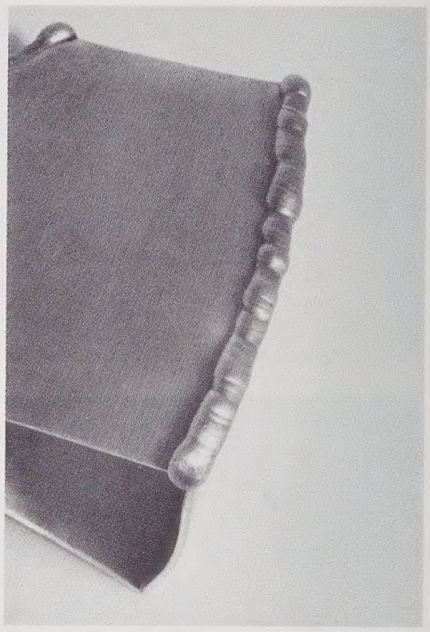
Welded samples tested for color

Inception Brooch
aluminum, hollow construction
oxyacetylene torch welded
7 x 3 x 1″, 1992

The adjustment of the torch was the final consideration before welding. A neutral flame was essential to provide enough concentrated heat without the introduction of excess acetylene or oxygen to the weld. The refinement of this flame was important to achieve consistent welds. The torch was adjusted so that the neutral flame developed an inner cone about 3/16 inch long. Eye protection rated for oxyacetylene welding was worn at all times, from the point of lighting and adjusting the torch until it was turned off.

To begin welding, I positioned the inner cone with its tip very nearly touching the seam, about 1/8 inch inside the end or edge of a component. With a flame of appropriate size, the base metal would begin to melt within 3 to 5 seconds. If it took any longer than this, I increased both gas flows to produce a slightly larger neutral flame. When the metal began to melt, I had to push the filler rod into line with the flame with a pecking gesture particular to this type of welding. Holding the torch in my more dexterous hand (unlike for most welding), I directed the flame down the seam at a 45° angle to preheat the path. In the other hand I held the filler rod at a 45° angle mirroring the position of the torch.

The weld bead was formed by tapping or pecking with the tip of the filler rod in the melt zone, leaving a fillet. The tapping was the final means to break through the thin, weak oxide layer. The material melted and flowed freely, creating a bright metal pool. I quickly developed a sense of the proper travel speed, keeping in mind that the parent metal had to melt before the next tap of the filler rod. With a sense of the travel speed, I was able to form a smooth and consistent bead. It was surprising to note that a 3-foot section of filler rod served to weld a 1-foot section of seam. If for some reason the weld was interrupted, I reheated the termination of the weld to a melt and penetrated with the filler rod. When the seam was completed and had air-cooled, I rinsed the flux off under warm water. There were a number of joints for which this process was effective. The T-joint, the butt joint, the flanged butt joint and the lap-joint were all appropriate where accessible for grinding and finishing afterward.



Oxyacetylene torch weld bead

The third means that I tested was metal inert gas (MIG) welding. Small MIG welders were available for about $200, making them viable in my search for affordable technology. They appeared to be toy-like machines that boasted the ability to weld 1/4-inch steel, stainless and aluminum on 110-volt, single-phase wall current. The Uno MIG was a great little welder, with a few parts to assemble and a small but useful manual. It was easily assembled and loaded with a 1-pound spool of 5356 filler wire. Most of its functions were self-explanatory and well documented in the manual. A rheostat and four-position switch controlled the wire feed speed and power output respectively. They provided a range of power and feed speeds well suited for welding aluminum. One-pound spools of a variety of filler alloys were easy to obtain, as were replacement tips, a couple of which burned up in the learning process. A second collar was purchased specifically for aluminum to prevent possible contamination when welding other metals. Pure argon was used as the inert shield gas.

A considerable amount of practice was required to develop a sense for forming a quality bead. Practice runs allowed testing of various power settings and wire feed speeds. My initial welds were dirty, lumpy and inconsistent, but practice allowed for improvement. Leather gloves, long sleeves, face and eye protection were always worn in the arc welding operation. The welder performed well, but results did not equal those in torch welding.

Metal inert gas (MIG) weld bead

In 1990 a research grant from the Lilly Foundation of Cleveland, Ohio, provided funding to further explore MIG welding. A second mini MIG welder, the SP100 made by Lincoln Electric, was tested. Infinitely variable wire feed speed and power output made this machine more effective but unable to match the results of the oxyacetylene torch. In sheet material 18 gauge and lighter, burning and warping were difficult to control. The mini MIG machines proved themselves most effective in medium- to heavy-duty fabrication, 14 gauge and below.

Color Testing

Dressing of the seam was accomplished in a number of ways. Grinding was done with adequate ventilation and a respirator, to avoid inhalation of the hazardous aluminum dusts. Seams were ground back quickly and easily with a belt grinder and rotary abrasives in a flex shaft. "Aluminum cut" files with serration-like teeth were very effective. Abrasive papers were then used to refine the seams before anodizing. The finished forms appeared to be seamless, with the filler material matching the parent metal. A variety of fillers and aluminum alloys were tested for compatibility. All were ground, filed and finished in the same manner, then readied for anodizing using pumice and Fantastik.

The welded samples were sectioned in order to test the effects of long and short anodizing times. The standard sulfuric acid anodizing process was unaltered. The aluminum was first etched in caustic soda. At this point the crucial color match of the seam and parent metal could be evaluated, the seam often appearing slightly darker than the parent metal. Care was taken in working with these baths regarding adequate ventilation and the use of eye protection, rubber gloves and a respirator. The nitric dip seemed to remove the gray film that developed in the caustic soda. At this point, however, it was advantageous to use a soft brush and cold water to fully remove the gray slurry.

Samples were anodized for 20- and 40-minute periods. The additional 20 minutes provided an increase in the thickness of the anodic layer that would serve to reduce the possibility of color variation after dyeing. Longer anodizing time allowed the saturation of colors and, with that, greater color consistency. The filler materials held up well in the acid baths, showing no signs of etching or pitting. The 20-minute anodizing period proved successful and helped identify filler alloys not compatible to the process. The most general purpose filler, 4043, was dismissed as a possibility. A 1100 filler rod with 1100 aluminum was the most consistent and reliable. The 40-minute series carried the same results.

Conclusion

My studies indicate that torch welding with appropriate precleaning and care is the most consistent and accessible means to fabricate objects in colorable lightweight aluminum. The 1100 alloy welded with 1100 filler provided the most vibrant colors for visually seamless fabrication. I had some success in welding castings but consider these methods best applied to fabrication in sheet, patterns, die forms, spinnings, raisings and forgings.

I would like to thank Stanley Lechtzin, Vickie Sedman, Daniella Kerner, Tim McCreight, SNAG, The Lilly Foundation, Rio Grande Albuquerque, GTE/Sylvania, West Point Supply Company, The Aluminum Association, Anodizing Specialists and Force Chemicals for their support and assistance.

Matthew Hollern is an assistant professor of metals and jewelry at the Cleveland Institute of Art.

SHELTERS & Shrines

Janice Kluge

By Carolyn J. Seifert-Kantor

Janice Kluge's houses combine personal metaphor, primal symbol and contemporary commentary on domestic issues. In her mixed media constructions, she combines found objects with industrial and precious materials while manipulating perspective, color, texture and scale to create a subjective visual language that, coupled with a limited number of recognizable images, stimulates a dialogue with the viewer and results in a multi-leveled meaning for the work.

The pedimented rectangle still functions as the archetypal symbol of the home in Western culture. Visually simple, it is a complex symbol that represents the dichotomies inherent in the subject's religious, social, psychological and historical development: home/house, shrine/shelter, womb/tomb, refuge/prison, inside/outside, unconscious/conscious, spiritual/physical, soul/body. Janice Kluge employs the house as a metaphor for the female soul/body. The house functions as a physical container for the expression of her feelings. The result is a personal metaphor.

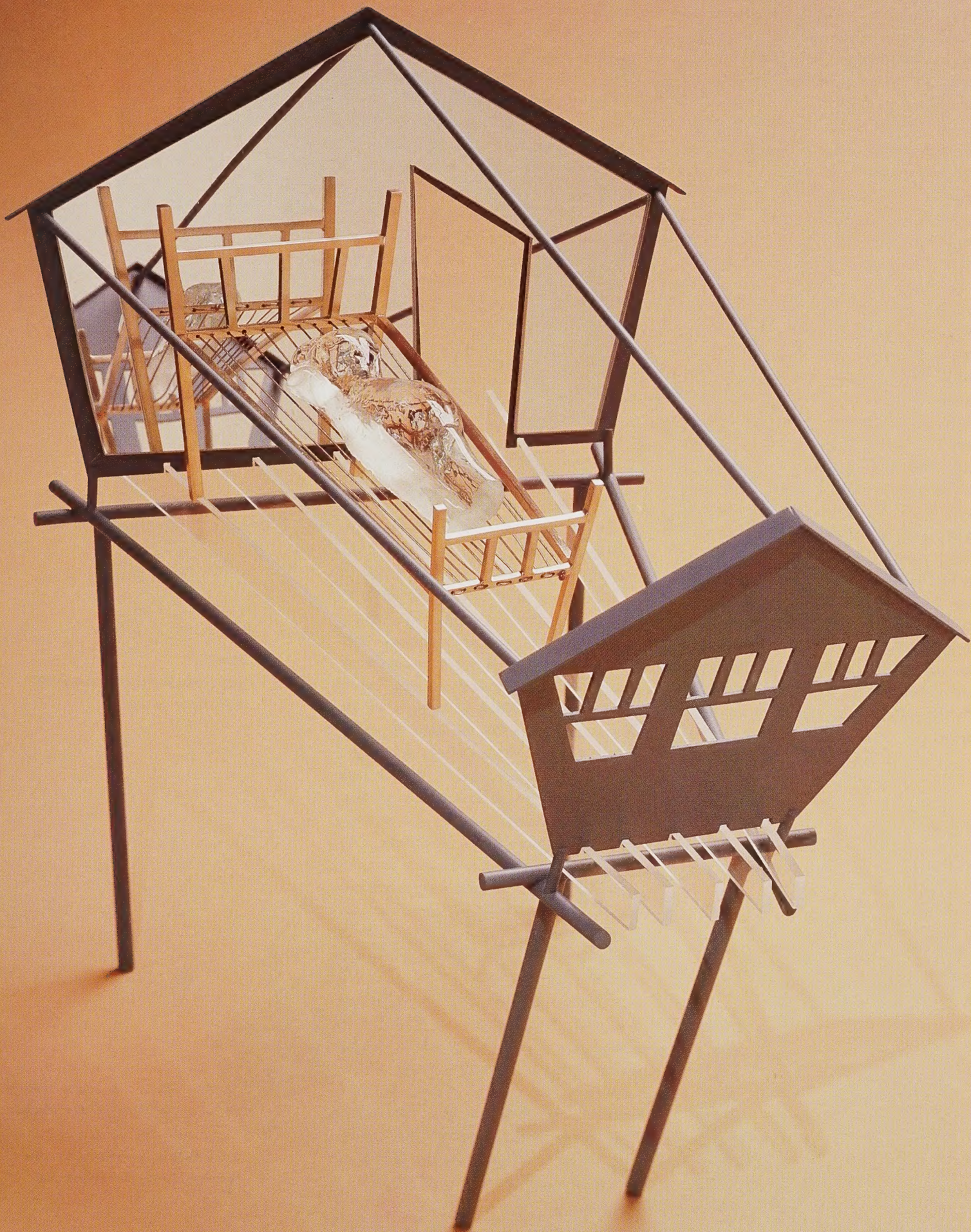
According to the artist, her work is "autobiographical and abstracted from actual experiences reflecting emotions, relationships, places and changes." These houses are self-portraits that express feelings that are diametrically opposed: joy and sorrow, ecstasy and depression, reverence and violation. A comparison of the turbulent upheaval of a "blasted" house like *Distorted Kitchen* (1984) with the serene sanctity of *Patron Saint* from Kluge's 1989 "icon" series reveals the variety and complexity possible of Kluge's work.

Like the sculptor Louise Bourgeois, whose *Femme-Maison (Woman-House)* is also an image of the house as a metaphor for the female soul/body, Kluge employs amorphous biomorphic forms or partial figures to indicate the human presence. At times she also includes chairs, ladders or birds to symbolize the human soul. The absence of human figuration results in an image that is both gendered and genderless, ambiguous, opened rather than closed to further interpretation.

Although Kluge acknowledges and pays homage to both Rousseau (*Adam and Eve Diptych,* 1988) and Giacometti (*Then She Was Gone,* 1989), she is not a neosurrealist but an eclectic. Categorizing her use of art historical sources as spiritual (reliquaries, icons), political (Edward Kienholz, Leon Golub) and personal (Van Gogh's bedrooms, Giacometti and certain "primitives" or folk artists), she contends that her work is related more to literary criticism than art criticism.

Patron Saint
mixed media, 9 x 8", 1989

Right
One Cold Night
polychrome metal, glass, silver and Plexiglas
13 x 9 x 14", 1984



Kluge also refers to her literary sources as spiritual (the Bible), political (newspapers) and personal (women writers such as Margaret Atwood, Ann Beattie, Amy Tan and Anne Tyler). The domestic stories and novels of contemporary female writers seem particularly influential in terms of "style." Novelists like Atwood and Tan utilize obsessive description in their intimate exploration of the emotional and historical worlds of their heroines. A parallel can be found in Kluge's careful manipulation of details such as color, material, technique and scale to focus on the poetic elements of image, meaning, narrative and metaphor.

One Cold Night (1984) combines feelings of anxiety, claustrophobia, isolation and entrapment. These sensations are the result of a meticulous attention to detail, resulting in a certain preciousness. The house, a skeletal creature on trembling legs, becomes the stage for some cataclysmic trauma. The diagonal perspective stretches and compresses the space. This acuity is enhanced by sharp-edged pieces of Plexiglas that serve as floorboards. Inside, lying upon a narrow bed designed for torture rather than dreams, is an inert, globular form, a piece of sandblasted glass found on the floor of the glass studio of the artist's husband. It becomes the perfect metaphor for the cast-off woman. The silver wall that mirrors the room further enhances the cold loneliness and isolation of the feminine form. The small scale establishes an immediate intimacy with the viewer, negating any sense of voyeurism.

These qualities of intimacy and empathy are not lost when scale and space are made architectural and public. *Stars Fell* (1990) was commissioned by the state of Alabama for one of the art-designated rotunda spaces in the state building. Although the title refers to a book about Alabama's destiny, the work can be interpreted in terms of human destiny. In this case, it refers specifically to Kluge's choice to move from the Midwest and make a new home in Alabama. A schematic metal outline drawing of a house is attached to the wall. Thus, the architecture becomes part of the work. Falling from the sky through the roof is an unfurled piece of titanium which in its color and texture could be described as painterly. Resembling cloth rather than metal, it forms a carpeted pathway to the stars. Inside the house, a single chair is attached to a glass door upon which is a stylized silhouette of the artist standing on the threshold. The empty chair, which appears in other works, is a metaphor for waiting and isolation. In this instance, however, the empty chair may be the "place" waiting for the artist/viewer.

A political interpretation of the houses is also possible. Although Kluge's images are universal rather than stereotypical, the feminist issues raised by her use of the house and domestic objects are inescapable. Since the early 1970s the house, housewife and domestic objects have been used in feminist art and literature to focus on socio-political and economic issues in the lives of American women. During the 1970s, in both the fine arts and mass media, the house/housewife was a metaphor for women's fate and biological and economic struggle. In the 1980s this same image became an icon of domesticity – an image of security and the object of nostalgic yearning for the lost American dream. Suburban and domestic imagery was found in the art of both men and women. What was originally a feminine stereotype became genderless. Kluge's houses reflect this change and can be attributed to the multi-level meanings and readings that she encourages in her work.

Filled with personal emotion and universal meaning, Kluge's houses are disquieting in their emptiness. Her work has the sense of an odyssey, perhaps a search for an image to fill the house-shrine. At the end of Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife,* Winnie says, "I am looking for a goddess that no one knows. Maybe she does not exist." Janice Kluge also searches for that image that will define her place in the world.

The Distorted Kitchen
polychrome metal, 16 x 11 x 7", 1984

Stars Fell
brass, titanium, mirror, 3 x 4½' x 8"
1990. Photo: Lee Isaacs

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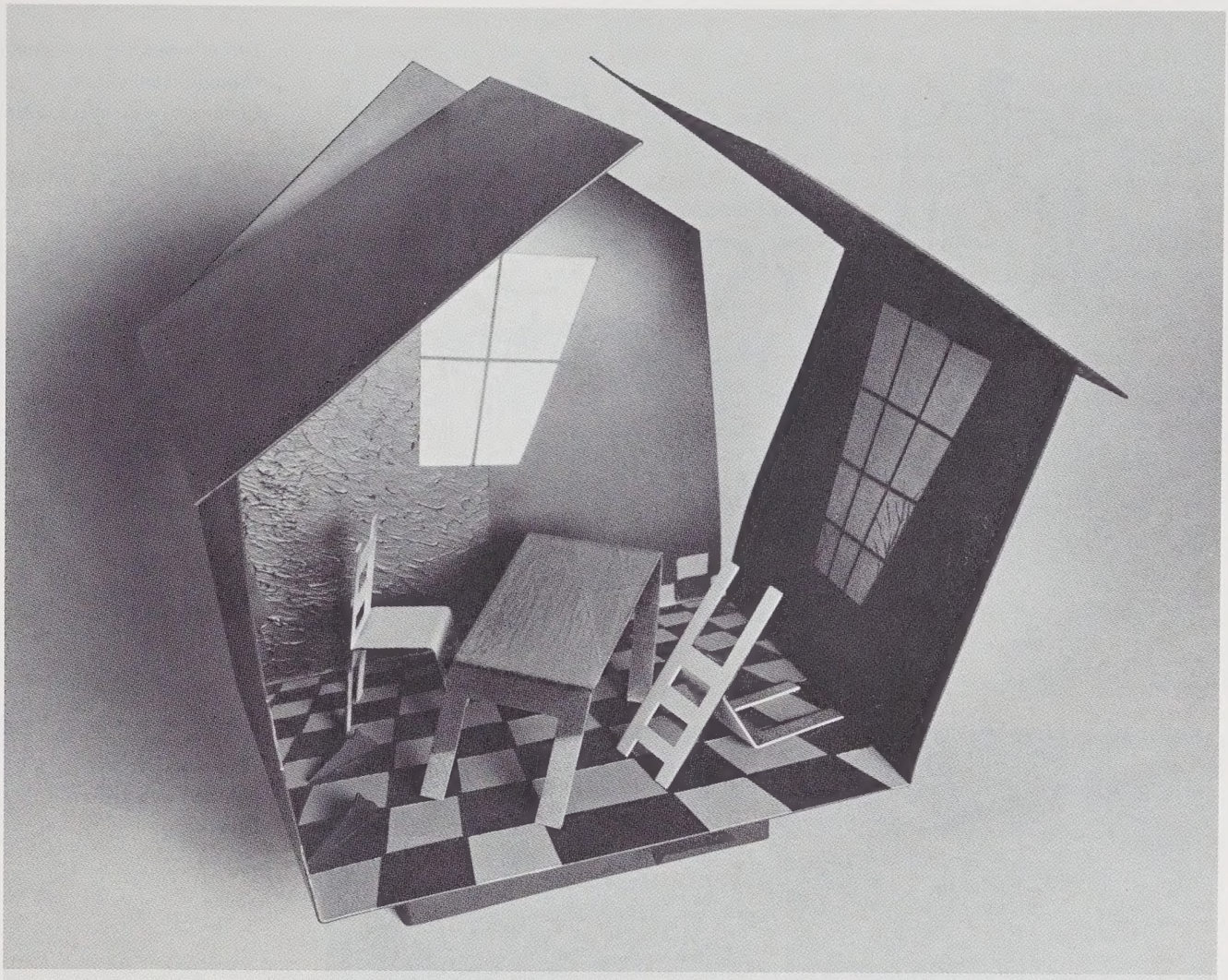
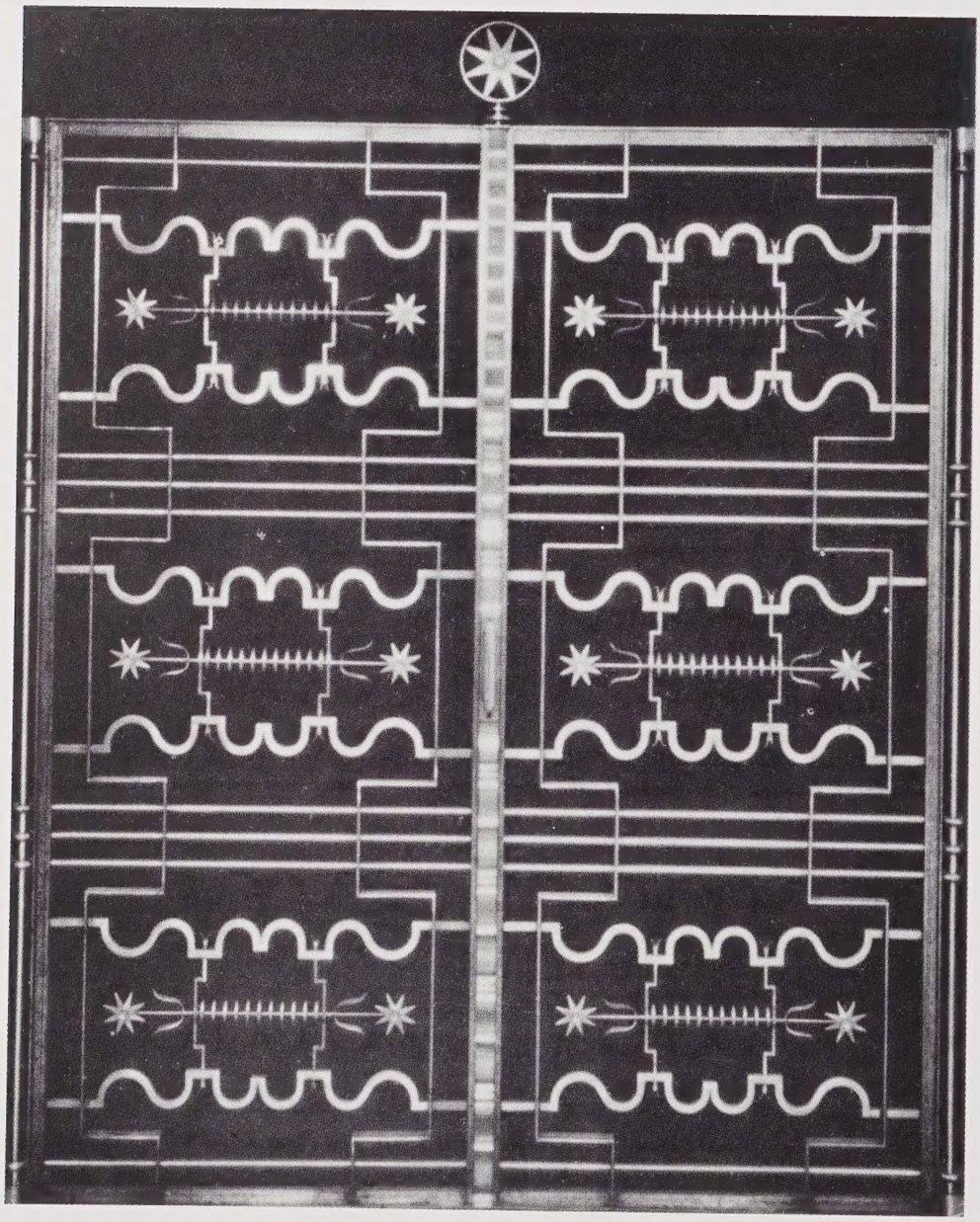
Janice Kluge is a professor of art at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.



Pair of armchairs with scalloped aprons
wrought iron, c. 1950
Courtesy: Sotheby's, London



Roses des Vents
polished iron grille
Paris, 1929

Gilbert Poillerat

A HALF-CENTURY OF IRONWORK DESIGN

By Joan Kahr

French ironwork of the 1920s, as exemplified in the work of Edgar Brandt, represented a pinnacle of technical achievement and aesthetic expression. Brandt exhibited a natural sense of composition and form which was abetted by his ability to combine artistic ideals with industrial concerns. His prodigious output of objects from fire screens to desk sets set the vogue for stylized evocations of Egyptian, Assyrian and neoclassical motifs. In the second decade of the 20th century, Brandt was the acknowledged master of ferronnier and a major participant in the Exposition des Art Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes of 1925.

In his design atelier, Brandt employed a small number of collaborators. Among them was Gilbert Poillerat, who was destined to take the mantle from Brandt and create an entirely new and refreshing aesthetic. While both men responded vigorously to the technological achievements of the time, Poillerat, who was 22 years younger than Brandt, had a very different set of creative impulses to bring to the art of wrought iron.

Gilbert Poillerat was born in 1902 in the small town of Mer, Loir et Cher to a family of millers, many of whom had a strong artistic bent. His father was a painter, and his uncle a calligrapher. His older brother, Maurice, was a Bohemian who became a music hall performer. Young Gilbert, wanting to emulate his father, began to draw at an early age. While he was still a young boy, the family moved to Paris to run a hotel in Passy on the rue Massenet.

When he was 16 years old, Poillerat entered the Ecole Boulle on the rue de Ruilly, which was a training school for furniture and metal workers. Since Poillerat's drawings for the entrance examination veered toward metal, a major in sculpture and engraving was chosen. All students took courses in design, theory, modeling, perspective, composition and decoration. For metal majors there were workshops in gold and silver smithing, chasing, engraving, jewelry making, steel engraving, bronze casting, repoussé, hub and die cutting and metal turning.

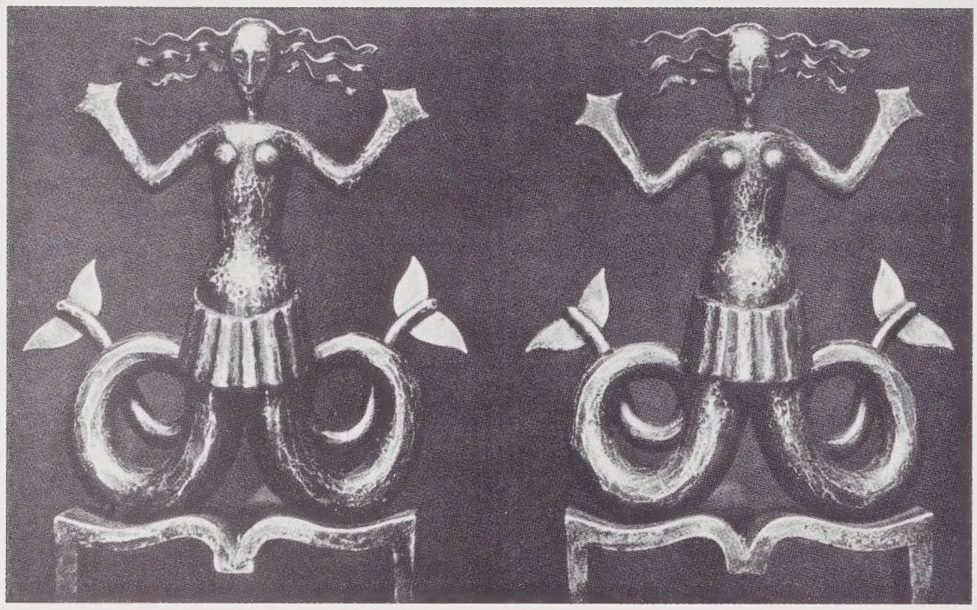
From 1918 until 1921 Poillerat learned his craft. Master's diploma in hand, he found a job making gold elements for a jeweler-goldsmith on the rue de la Paix. He soon left for a position with Jean Dunand, the master of dinanderie and lacquer work. Although Poillerat was well trained in copper work, he found the regime very demanding; Dunand exerted total control of his atelier.

A more favorable opportunity came quickly when Edgar Brandt inquired at the Ecole Boulle for graduates to work in his design atelier. For the next six years Gilbert Poillerat walked 20 minutes every day from his apartment to Brandt's sumptuous offices, exhibition gallery and workshops on Boulevard Murat. Henri Favier, an Ecole des Beaux-Arts architect, headed the design studio. Pierre Lardin and Henri Martin, also of the Ecole Boulle, rounded out the design staff. Favier was about 20 years older than Poillerat and his co-workers. With his natural charm and classical spirit, the architect was able to temper the younger men's ardor. In return the three designers helped him discover the avant-garde, cubism and Le Corbusier. Generally there were 20 to 30 welders, blacksmiths, cutters, drillers, chiselers and polishers working in Brandt's establishment.

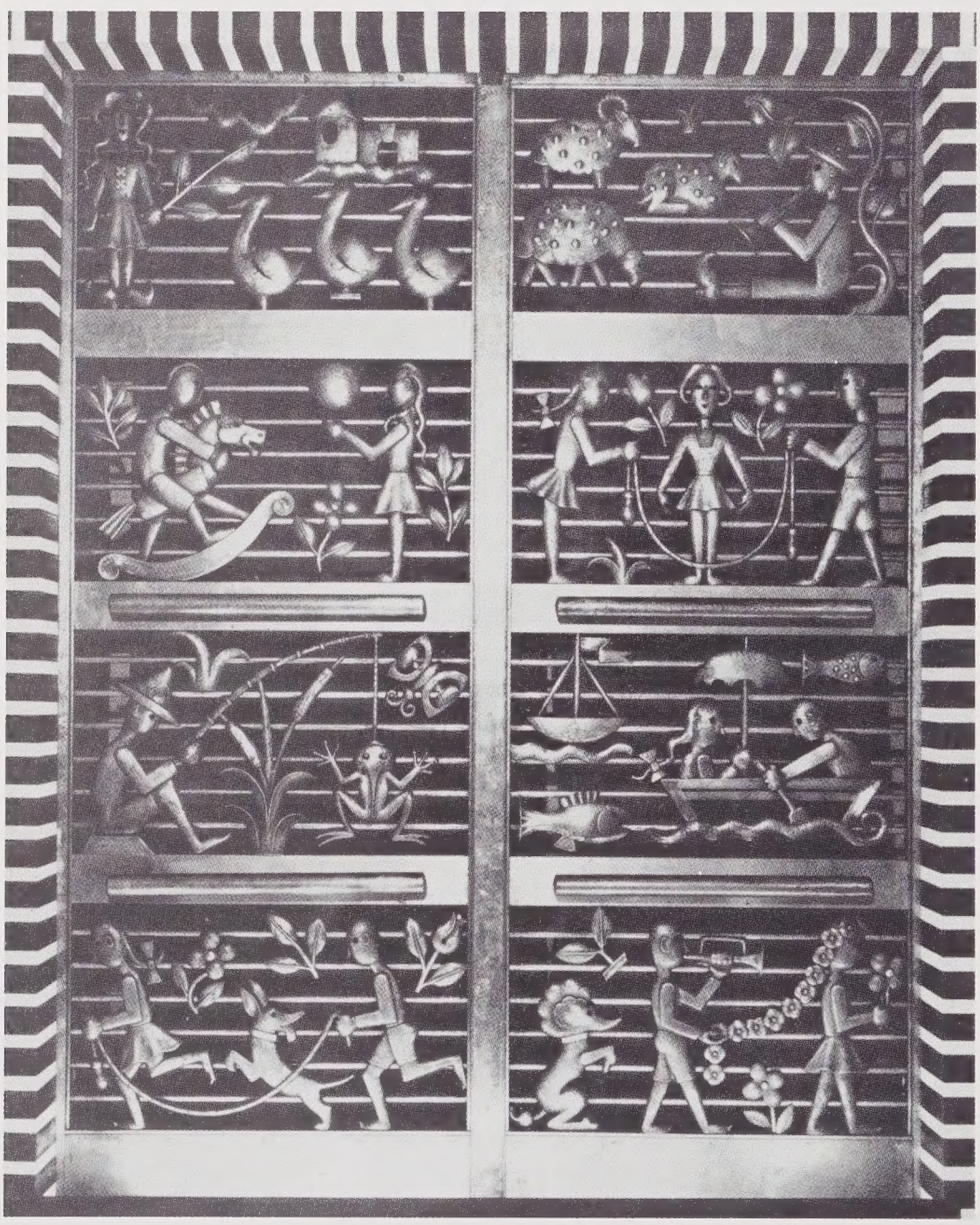
Poillerat was content because he found that as an ornamentor-creator of ironwork he had the opportunity to design. Some *createurs* would do a small ironwork design to scale on paper, but Poillerat preferred to make a large drawing. Although he was trained to work the forge, he seldom used it. More frequently he chiseled or engraved something to show the workers the effects he wanted. For the Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes of 1925, Henri Favier and André Ventre were responsible for the Porte d'Honneur. Poillerat designed the connecting central gate of the entrance and a huge chandelier with Sèvres porcelain for the Sèvres pavilion.

In 1927 Poillerat accepted an offer to head a small ferronnerie division for Baudet, Donon et Roussel, a manufacturer of large works such as bridges, power plants and steel girders for buildings. The owners had decided to establish a small ironwork atelier for the prestige it would add to the company. Brandt asked Poillerat to stay on to head his design atelier because Favier was leaving. Poillerat saw a greater advantage with B.D.& R., where he would have a staff of 12 men, complete artistic freedom and no financial worries. He stayed with them until after World War II.

Poillerat's first showing in the Salon d'Automne of 1928 was a grille that combined forceful polished steel zigzag bars with the softness of calligraphy-like scrolls. However, it was not until 1929, when *Roses des Vents*, a wrought iron grille, was exhibited at the Salon des Artistes Décorateurs, that Poillerat was recognized as a serious designer. The polished iron bars, squiggles, spools and stars in *Roses des Vents* are humorous evocations of the machine orientation in a newly industrializing society.



Mermaid andirons
wrought iron, 1928



Door for a nursery school
Maisons-Alfort, 1934

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The Society of North American Goldsmiths

The Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG) was formed in 1970 to promote contemporary metalwork and jewelry. Through its publications, services and advocacy, SNAG serves the fine art and jewelry communities. SNAG's publications and conferences provide technical information and critical insight to practitioners and teachers of metalwork. Professional metalsmiths, students, collectors, gallery owners and enthusiasts make up the dynamic mix of the Society.

Services

The Society's annual conference provides a forum for the exchange of many points of view. Speakers of national recognition offer stimulating discourse on a range of topics. Members of the Society attend the conference at reduced rates.

The Society sponsors important exhibitions of contemporary metalwork. Past SNAG shows have been mounted at the Renwick Gallery, the St. Paul Museum of Art and several galleries in New York City. These exhibitions are usually restricted to members only.

The Society maintains an audio-visual library, which contains the portfolios of distinguished members and other notable metalsmiths. Members can rent slides, films and videotapes at a nominal cost.

The Society operates a discount book service, through which important texts on all aspects of the field can be ordered at a reduced price.

Publications

Metalsmith is the only magazine in America devoted solely to the metal arts. Please see the reverse side of this page for a detailed description of this exciting magazine. Membership in the Society includes a subscription to *Metalsmith.*

The *SNAG Newsletter* is published bimonthly and is available to members only. It features timely information on exhibitions, work-shops, conferences and job opportunities throughout North America.

Membership Categories

The Society offers several types of memberships, each tailored to a specific level of involvement in the field of contemporary metalsmithing.

- *General Membership* ($45) is open to everyone and includes subscriptions to *Metalsmith* and the *SNAG Newsletter,* reduced conference fees, access to all of SNAG's services and full voting privileges.
- *Student Membership* ($30) is offered at a reduced rate to any full-time student attending an accredited educational institution. This membership offers all the advantages of a *general membership* but does not carry voting privileges. Please send a copy of your student ID with membership application.
- *Institutional Membership* ($45) is available for nonprofit organizations such as schools and libraries. Institutions receive *Metalsmith* magazine and the *SNAG Newsletter.*

Checks (drawn on US banks) should be made payable to SNAG, in U.S. dollars only. Contributions are deductible within legal limits for tax purposes. Allow eight to ten weeks to receive your first copy of *Metalsmith.*

Poillerat's work stood apart as it broke with the older traditions and style that had been so popular at the Exposition of 1925. Probably his exposure to the avant-garde artists of Montparnasse, the circle of Jean Cocteau, progressive writers such as Jean Giraudoux and André Gide, experimental musicians like Eric Satie, conversations at La Coupole and La Rotonde, his friendships with Dora Maar and Charlotte Perriand and his awareness of Le Corbusier's work led Poillerat to a new way of synthesizing his art. In place of the traditional small, tight C scrolls, he proffered elongated bars of iron that redefined the malleability quotient of wrought iron. Lace-like console tables defied their material. Linear bars of varying thicknesses were combined with geometric shapes and individual accents such as stars, spools and figures. Infused with a sense of movement and energy, Poillerat's designs opened a new path for ferronnerie.

Since the 1925 Exposition, American department store buyers had been coming to Paris. By 1928 Poillerat was fulfilling orders from Macy's and Wanamaker's for fire dogs and other small works in wrought iron. Macy's ordered his humorous andirons in the form of sailors. Another imaginative pair were mermaids with flying hair, whose *art-nègre* faces reflect the influence of *le jazz hot*, the American music that had enveloped Paris.

At no time did Poillerat sign his ferronnerie with a stamp. He firmly believed that the work itself was a signature, showing as it did the style and quality of the designer. He followed the tradition of Far Eastern artists, who did not sign anything except for the American market, where a signature was expected. Since Edgar Brandt's work was always being copied, even by his own workers, Brandt had a policy of stamping his objects. Poillerat was not upset when people copied him. He was too eager to move on to the next design.

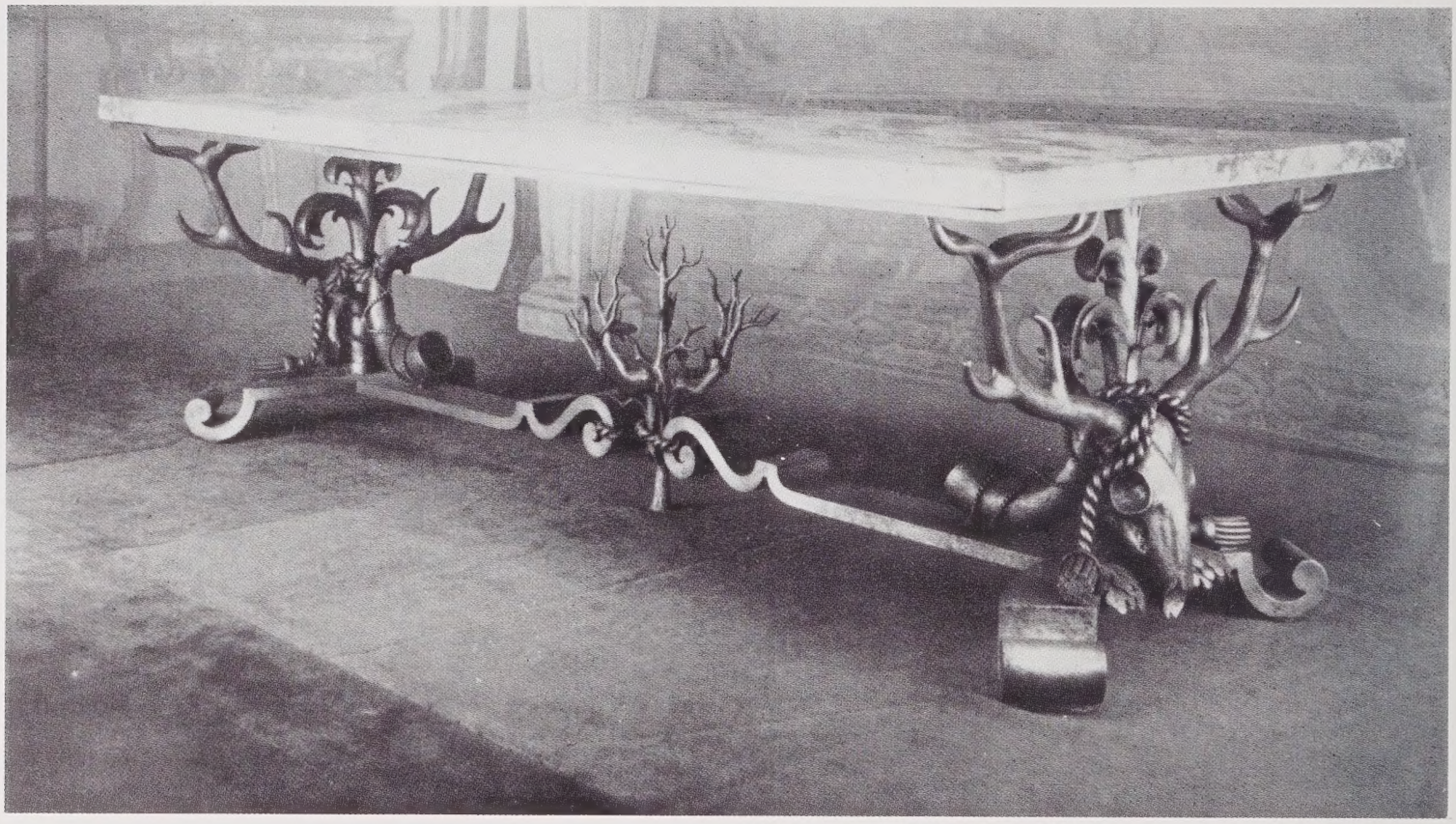
In the early days at Baudet, Donon et Roussel, Poillerat introduced a totally new element to wrought iron: calligraphy. A console table of 1929, a bannister (1930) and two radiator covers (1930), all made for the London home of the James Rothschilds, show the beauty of this expression. Poillerat himself traced these light and delicate designs to his early exposure to calligraphy. As a young boy, he had watched his uncle write evangelistic messages that he decorated elaborately and gave to friends to place under their beds for good luck.

To achieve what appeared to be endless curves of iron, Poillerat first drew a pattern in ink, then had a plaster mold of the design made. Next, a blacksmith would heat iron bars and apply them to the plaster so as to bend them to the correct angles; the gypsum would not burn. The bars were then joined by *en taille*, and the joints welded and polished to hide the seams from all but the expert eye. These lyrical poems in iron offered endless possibilities in the early 1930s.

The range of Poillerat's commissions were quite varied. Houses of worship always needed such hand-forged items as altars, communion screens, candelabra and gates. Museums also offered commissions to specialists in ferronnerie. In 1932 Poillerat completed a stair railing for the Louvre called the *Escalier Daru*. It is interesting to note that 22 years earlier Edgar Brandt had completed his first major French commission, the *Escalier Mollien*, also in the Louvre. While Brandt's work was steeped in the art nouveau and classical modes, Poillerat's stairway provided a stark foil for the second-century Greek marble *Winged Victory*, which stood at the top of the stairs. It was only the first of several works that he would make for the Louvre.

In 1934 Poillerat designed the first-class pool for the ill-fated ship *Normandie*. The room featured six bronze doors: two large doors and four smaller ones. On one side of the pool was a long bar with greenish bronze stools that were affixed to the floor so they could not fall into the pool. Poillerat had recently designed a silver service for Leo Hendrik Baekeland, the inventor of Bakelite plastic, so he wanted to use this material for the pool bar. When it turned out to be too costly, he switched to lacquered wood and settled for using black Bakelite telephones, ashtrays and other small objects. Poillerat also worked with his friend André Arbus on the first-class smoking room for the ship *La France*.

At the same time that the designer was working on the great ocean liner, he was involved in a charming entrance door for a nursery school in Maisons-Alfort, a town just outside Paris. Divided into eight panels of happy childhood scenes, the door displays Poillerat's playful sense of humor as well as his command of repoussé. Each little figure has a paper cutout quality that produces sentiments similar to those evoked by children's drawings. This one-of-a-kind example of ferronnerie shows the flexibility of the designer, his faculty for comprehending the appropriate elements of each commission.



NATIONA
E

La Forêt
wrought iron and marble table
made for a hunting lodge, 1942

In 1937 Poillerat was working on the Right Bank on the hill of the old Trocadero. There the Palais de Chaillot was being built by the architects Azema and Boileau across from the Eiffel Tower. Poillerat's six pairs of entrance gates consist of rows of heavy bands of iron used horizontally and alternated with 18 protruding semicircles paired in threes. One is reminded of Louise Nevelson's black box collages, in which the dramatic play of light is as striking as it is on these iron gates. The fact that the gates are freestanding must have been an important design consideration. By juxtaposing curved protrusions against horizontal bands, Poillerat achieved a three-dimensional effect. In much the same way that one walks completely around a piece of sculpture, one has the desire to swing open the doors and have a look at the other side.

Beginning in 1937 and throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, Poillerat designed many aspects of the couture salon of his friend Jacques Heim on the rue Matignon near the Champs Elysées. His painted, gilded and patinated iron took the form of doorknobs, stair rails, boutique signs and fanciful planters. In later years Poillerat painted iron furniture white and achieved an airy foil for Heim's full-skirted dresses. In 1950 he created a painted and gilded wrought iron boutique sign that epitomizes his unique style: a heart-shaped pair of feminine eyeglasses hanging from a star attached to a spool of thread. In addition, Poillerat designed several collections of jewelry for Jacques Heim's boutique.

The boutique sign can be linked to a surrealist tendency in the designer's work during the previous decade. Perhaps the finest example of surrealism in ironwork can be seen in a large table called *La Forêt*. Poillerat utilized symbolic imagery in an untraditional collage that makes up the base of the table. The side supports incorporate animal skulls with fantastic antlers that are tied to scrolled stakes with thick coiled cord and tassels. Behind the skulls are hunting horns that pull the eye toward bare tree branches, the focal point of the central support.

After the war Poillerat started his own company, which operated in Montrouge, a suburb of Paris. Because Baudet, Donon et Roussel did very large works, Poillerat often used them to execute oversized commissions. Thus, after years of working for B.D.& R., he became their client.

One of six pairs of gates
wrought iron
Palais de Chaillot, Paris, 1937
Photo: Joan Kahr

Always known for his innovative use of materials, Poillerat was the first to use stainless steel in his designs instead of wrought iron. He also liked to gild bronze or apply gold leaf to wrought iron and would combine polished steel and gilded bronze for a table or bed frame. Many pieces were patinated with a greenish hue, and candelabra were often made of a combination of polished iron and silvered iron.

In his work of the 1940s and 1950s, Poillerat used many motifs culled from his vast knowledge of historical architecture and design. Some favorites were rope (rococo, régence); tassels (directoire); globes and astrolabes (world symbols); flames (fire, light, warmth); sunbursts (Louis XIV); feathers (symbols of writing, art); and bows and arrows (symbols of strength and love). Poillerat employed half-circles, hearts, triangles, tassels, rope, acanthus cups and leaves, and spinning top shapes in countless combinations, never repeating the same design. In the late 1950s he incorporated real shells and ostrich eggs into lamps and other pieces, as had been done in the 18th century. By the end of the 1950s his work became more geometric; squares and rectangles were made of thinner rods of steel. Table bases were variations of H and double U forms.

It was after the war as well that Poillerat assumed another career challenge. In 1946 the minister of the Beaux-Arts offered him a post as professor at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Art Décoratifs. He designed a program for teaching art history to future decorators and decorative artists. It emphasized antiquity but also included the present. Poillerat took his students to the studios of contemporary artists, which was a new idea at the time. He became one of the most popular teachers at the school, where he remained for 26 years. While carrying out his professorial duties, he continued to design jewelry, wrought iron, bronze and silver.

In addition to designing for such national monuments as the Louvre, the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Palais de Chaillot, Poillerat worked on projects for the Archives Nationales, the Arts et Métiers, the Mobilier National, the Nacker Museum, the Salpêtrière, the Maison de la Radio, the Rouen theater, the Monument of the Deportées in Marseille and the Chamber of Commerce in Nantes. He also designed the Jeanne d'Arc bridge in Rouen and the Joinville Bridge. His characteristic style could be seen as well on guard rails for the Eiffel Tower.

Gilbert Poillerat saw the best of times for the art of ferronnerie. For half a century, from 1921 to 1971, he practiced his principal art form – designing for wrought iron and all its applications. He enriched every facet of the metal arts with humor, originality and passion for the medium. Somewhere in the south of France is a bronze tree filled with birds that he designed for the outside of a friend's house. Although it is only one of thousands of objects that are part of the ferronnier's legacy, the flourishing tree with visible strong roots seems a fitting remembrance for the nature-loving artist. Like the tree, Poillerat absorbed the fertile soil of his metier – its traditions and its technical advances. Like the tree, he moved toward the sunlight, growing in ability and spreading beauty.

Source Note

This article is based on personal interviews and a long correspondence with the artist, as well as years of research on the period.

Joan Kahr is a decorative arts historian based in Woodmere, NY, who focuses on the disciplines of blacksmithing and metalsmithing.

New Art Forms
Art Jewelry Symposium

INTRODUCTION
BY JUDITH MITCHELL

Over one hundred visitors to the Chicago International New Art Forms Exposition last September left the exposition's plush Navy Pier site to spend a morning in a dusty attic. There seven panelists were to discuss, according to the flyers, "topics of market, public visibility, collecting, material vs. conceptual value and wearability as relates to art jewelry."

The Schneider-Bluhm-Loeb Gallery, a sponsor of the event along with the Susan Cummins, Franklin Parrasch and Perimeter galleries, provided the attic space at no charge, and the mood was certainly far from bleak. Still, there was a forlorn symbolism to that stark setting. Jewelers who so often perceive themselves as the unwanted orphans of the art and even the craft worlds met in isolated and spartan surroundings to figure out how to wangle an invitation to the fine arts party.

It had been difficult to get an invitation even to this little gathering; the demand for tickets had been so great that many people were turned away. It was a standing-room-only audience comprised primarily of working and student jewelers but including a surprisingly healthy number of collectors, dealers and other proponents of the field who heard moderator Bruce Metcalf promise a morning of provocative dialogue and controversy.

There was little of either. As one might expect from a forum entitled "Art Jewelry Symposium," the majority of the speakers accepted without examination the belief that jewelry is indeed art. As a result, the event was more a "how to" seminar – how to establish credibility, how to seduce collectors, how to win friends and influence curators – than an introspective look at the field's investigations.

Eleanor Moty talked about selling to collectors, Ken Loeber about the positive value of production jewelry. In an energetic and ambitious call to action, Thomas Mann set forth over a dozen tasks jewelers need to accomplish, from launching public relations campaigns in their communities to battling tax laws that hinder charitable giving, from demanding uniform professional practices by galleries to lobbying art schools to teach critical writing and business acumen.

Another speaker comfortable with the assumption that jewelry is art was Jan Yager who, like Mann, recited a list of obstacles to overcome and actions to undertake. But Yager also considered barriers imposed by the field itself. When she demanded that every piece jewelers produce be of the highest quality, she alluded to the most formidable impediment to jewelry's success – jewelers who make work that is derivative, poorly fashioned or shallow.

Panelist William Harper never mentioned whether he considers the work of other contemporary jewelers to be art, but he certainly anointed his own with that mantle. Declaring himself an artist and not a jeweler, Harper described the success he has enjoyed in fine arts arenas and among collectors of contemporary painting and sculpture (as opposed to fanciers of craft or jewelry). In lieu of proposing ways in which others might achieve similar success, Harper asserted his disinterest in fostering the field and its market.

In sharp contrast to Harper's professed indifference to jewelry was collector Kathryn Sackheim's passion for it. At once emotional and intellectual, strong and vulnerable, personal and professional, Sackheim provided fascinating insight into the thought processes that take place on the other side of the selling counter. She was direct, funny and smart, and when the symposium ended, she bought the piece Metcalf was wearing right off his lapel.

Before becoming the only panelist to make a sale, Metcalf had also garnered two other distinctions – he was the only panelist to examine jewelry's claim to art status and the only one to reject that claim. In a thoughtful and substantiated analysis, Metcalf concluded that the absence of strong ideology in most jewelry makes it craft rather than fine art and, further, that there is no shame in that.

The ensuing question and answer period illustrated how difficult it can be to put into action the advice that had been offered all morning. Almost every speaker had bemoaned the dearth of good critical writing (Harper characterized existing writing as "crap"), yet none could provide anything more than bland words of encouragement to a young writer expressing interest in the field. Far worse, when a potential collector asked where she might go to actually see some of this work, the panel suggested an American Craft Enterprises fair. Geared to owners of craft stores, these crowded venues enervate and overwhelm even the most educated of collectors. How much better is would have been to refer the unschooled to a body of strong pieces gathered by an expert with a definite point of view than to a vast and commercially oriented craft fair. How much better to furnish the names of a few good books (Ralph Turner's *The New Jewelry* comes to mind) and a few good galleries (Susan Cummins' New Art Forms exhibit featuring work by Lisa Gralnick, Bob Ebendorf, Jamie Bennett, Barbara Heinrich and others was easily accessible; Helen Drutt was sitting right there in the audience).

Rather than this Q & A session, one longed for the promised dialogue. It never occurred. It seemed a shame that people with such diverse aesthetic views as Eleanor Moty and William Harper, such diverse professional approaches as Thomas Mann and Bruce Metcalf, were not allowed to interact.

But there was far more to commend than criticize about this forum. Particularly heartening was the commitment to the field expressed by almost all the speakers, the impressive turnout, and the generosity of the sponsoring galleries who not only furnished space and doughnuts but also managed to attract more jewelry collectors than most jewelers dream exist. The pragmatic approach taken by so many of the panelists created an air of camaraderie, a sense of direction. The complaint most frequently voiced was that the morning had ended too soon, leaving the art world's orphans, like so many Oliver Twists, clamoring for more.

Here, then, in hopes of encouraging a second go-round, are reprints of three of the speeches. Yager's and Sackheim's appeared to generate the most excitement and discussion among participants; Metcalf's merits careful reading. Animated debate about the ideas expressed in these talks emanated from the cabs that returned the audience to Navy Pier, where they rejoined the rest of the craft community.

Bruce Metcalf

Here we are at an Art Jewelry Symposium. The term used, Art Jewelry, makes a very specific claim: that there is jewelry that is also art. If there is such a thing, I think it might be useful to test the assertion. The obvious place to start is by making comparisons between jewelry and the larger body of art in the world. How does "art jewelry" stand up?

In this case, the claim to the status of art aims exactly at art museums, art publications, art collectors and other individuals and institutions that constitute the Eurocentric system that controls the reception of art. It is reasonable, then, to make the first comparison to modern European and American art. One overriding characteristic of most of this modern art is that it all refers to specific theories and agendas. Cubism addressed simultaneous perspective and the fracturing of perspectival space; surrealism tried to give visual form to Freudian theories about the unconscious; much New York School painting illustrated Greenberg's theory that formal values and flatness were the only legitimate competency of painting, and so on. Each epoch, each movement was largely a response to, and a debate about, sets of ideas in conflict. The resultant artwork was a visual record of artists' attempts to manifest a theory or to resolve a conflict.

Similarly, the history of craft and design since 1850 is actually a dialogue of discourses. The modern craft movement started with the theoretical speculations of John Ruskin, put into practice by William Morris. The Aesthetic movement, Art Nouveau, De Stijl, Constructivism, the Bauhaus – all were founded on an ongoing discussion about the role of art and craft in modern society, and how that role might be best implemented. Most of these movements had a fundamental schism, a point about which agreement could not be reached, and the resultant debates stimulated a great deal of interesting work. The production of objects did not occur just because some person felt like making a pot or a rug one day, but because she or he could address an idea. For the past 140 years, discourse has shaped the crafts.

However, contemporary American jewelry evidences little in the way of discourse or argument. The intellectual component is absent. There is a peculiar scarcity of useful and interesting ideas about jewelry and there is correspondingly a scarcity of stimulating discourse. As a result, most jewelers tend to be guided by received assumptions of the nature of the practice and by strict personal intuition. Unfortunately, American craftspeople subscribe to the myth that technical knowledge is sufficient – once you know how to control the process of the chosen craft, questions about its history, theory and status are not terribly relevant. Personally, I blame this myth on college teachers who don't bother to conduct their own research on the subject, and on the absolute failure of art history departments to incorporate craft into the canon of "important" topics. As a result, generations of students never learn the histories of their own disciplines, ultimately believing that discourse and theory are irrelevant to their practice. While that may not appear to be a bad thing, I believe the lack of discourse has stunted the growth of the discipline and has denied our audience the opportunity to participate in any meaningful narrative about the nature of jewelry.

Most studio jewelers are content to make well-designed, well-made and sturdily functional jewelry. Obviously an important place exists for such work. It's jewelry, it adorns, it does what we believe jewelry is supposed to do. But I insist that good design, good craftsmanship and pedestrian functionality, taken together but going no further, are not sufficient to *art*. The net result is that American "art jewelry," when tested against the rest of modern art, appears to be intellectually shallow and even stupid.

Contemporary art jewelry takes place against the background of the postwar American craft revival, which in turn takes place against the background of a fully industrialized society. It's safe to say that no Americans buy craft because they have to, because Bloomingdale's and Marshall Field are full of manufactured items that serve similar purposes at lower prices. Craft is produced and purchased precisely because it is handmade and is perceived as an antidote to the anonymity, impersonality and boring regularity of mass-produced objects. This is an entirely new condition. Theories of art and design failed to account for the possibility that people might reject mass production. Neither the Bauhaus nor the Constructivists imagined that the industrial age they so fervently hoped for might fail to satisfy the needs and desires of the masses.

Because early Modernist theories focused exclusively on ownership, production, reductivist design values and the symbolism of the modern industrialized age, none of them paid attention to the human beings that all the new objects intended to serve. A vacuum was created, and you could say that craft rushed in where theory feared to tread. Where design theory generated stripped-down, machine-made objects for the domestic environment, craft provided decorative, colorful, handmade objects with a broad popular appeal. Craft is also unapologetically mercantile and unashamedly targeted toward the middle class. As such, craft serves as a counteraction against all the heavy-duty claims and obligations of Modernist design theory. The oppositional characteristic of craft has not been articulated or explored, but it remains one of the most important aspects of the field.

Oriented as it is toward the middle class, toward the market and toward the satisfaction of a range of psychological and social needs, craft can be neither radical (especially in a Marxian sense) nor avant-garde. Hal Foster, writing enthusiastically about Russian Constructivism, defines conservative art as arising from "the legacy of a Western bourgeois culture, of forms of art based on artisanal modes, directed toward individual reception, governed by an idealist discourse of taste, and produced for a patron market." While Foster disapproves of such things, being an unreconstructed Marxist, he provides an accurate description of the crafts and, by extension, studio jewelry. The accusation of being bourgeois might make a Marxist quake in shame, but these days few Americans regard their middle-class roots as a crime against humanity. As I said, American craft is solidly rooted in the middle class.

Craft is necessarily artisanal and not industrial. Far from being an anachronism, craft in the late 20th century demonstrates that industrial production has its problems answering human needs. Craft is produced for a patron market as well as a mass market. It's also important to remember that most craftspeople continue to work because the labor itself is satisfying. Craft is "governed by an idealist discourse" to some degree, but certainly not by the "materialist discourse of dialectics" that Foster approves. Instead of offering a radical critique of culture, craft accepts small-time capitalism as an expedient device, and instead of an avant-garde mentality that constantly demands a fodder of fashionable new ideas, it tends to recycle a modest collection of familiar themes. Craft is comparatively stable, respectful of traditions, conservative. Basically, craft is a bourgeois artform.

We are so accustomed to the paradigm of endless forward progress in the arts that it seems the inherent conservatism of craft necessarily renders it unintellectual. This is a false conclusion. When Modernism turned a blind eye to the needs and desires of people, craft was responsive and pragmatic. Craft specializes in empathy to the other – at least the other who can be reached in the marketplace. The discourse and debate that craft so urgently needs can be stimulated by examining what craft has always done: performing a service, mediating between the individual, her environment and her society.

We need to examine how objects function, not just in a physical manner as bowls and tables and garments, but in the realm of the social and psychological. Physical anthropologists have documented how people employ objects in other cultures, so why can't we regard our own culture the same way? Why, after all, have handmade objects gained such widespread acceptance in this highly industrialized country? How can craft offer a morally and ecologically responsible alternative to mass production? How can we explain the value of decoration, which Modernism attempted to wipe from the face of the earth? Why were the college students I taught so thrilled to work with their hands, when all the overt messages in our culture place physical labor in such a low status? How can crafts address the spiritual emptiness that so many of us sense? These are the questions that can become the subjects of our discourse; that can become the intellectual content of craft.

All these topics are potential subjects for jewelry. But I will caution that most of these ideas are not usually construed as having anything to do with aesthetics, and thus have not been proper subject matters for art. So I propose that jewelers stop trying to make art. No more "art jewelry." The term "art" is too loaded and biased to be useful; the kind in *Art Forum* and *Art in America* is too tainted by ideological limitations placed on the legitimate possibilities of art. The questions I just posed are typically thought to be too banal and dirty to be the subject of aesthetic inquiry and thus beneath the dignity of real artists. Until the whole idea of art can be repaired and revised, let's have something else: "message jewelry" or "work jewelry" or "real life jewelry." Instead of hanging around the temple of art begging for entry, let's have a new jewelry that addresses the lives we actually lead.

In the broadest sense, I believe the subject of jewelry is trying to heal some of the dislocations and alienations in late-industrial capitalist culture. While more critical artists propose the reconstitution of the individual or dismantling the privileges of the middle class, jewelry operates in more humble ways. Actually, many practitioners already address the issues I've spoken about, but they don't articulate them. This silence is unfortunate. Nonetheless, by insisting on a collective examination of the nature of personal adornment and of craft, we can draw a map of the place, purpose and possibilities of jewelry. By clarifying an agenda and by describing ambitions, we can start to distinguish between the good stuff and the schlock. We can also use the debate to energize and give a direction to the whole enterprise of jewelry as craft.

The ambition of the Russian Constructivists was to place art into life, a project at which they mostly failed. Craft has undertaken the same project and succeeded, but without understanding. If the insertion of objects into everyday life is a distinguishing characteristic of jewelry, then let's examine and question that enterprise. Only if practice is synthesized with careful thought will jewelry become that elusive thing we all seem to crave – art.

Kathryn Sackheim

I have always loved jewelry. I can't pass a jewelry store or jewelry display at a craft fair. I have to look at everything. When I see a great fashion ad or a beautifully dressed woman, it's the jewelry that catches my eye first.

Jewelry is emotional for me on many levels. Like anything else beyond one's reach, it's the forbidden object that holds the most fascination. When I was nine or ten and watched my grandmother get dressed to go out for an evening, she always put on some wonderful piece of jewelry that belonged to her mother, my great-grandmother. Whenever I admired an especially lovely piece, my grandmother was quick to inform me that the jewelry she inherited from her mother would pass on to my sister, who was named after my great-grandmother.

My great-grandmother died before my sister was born, and I was the oldest grandchild, two valid reasons for feeling angry and hurt. One does not have to be a mental health professional to have a field day with this story. Suffice it to say that at a very young age I understood at a gut level that the person who owns jewelry and is in a position to give it away wields tremendous power.

The family saga is not over. My sister got hers, although not for many years. When my paternal grandmother died, the distribution of jewelry was assigned to my mother and aunt. My mother told me in front of my sister that she especially wanted me to have a particular bracelet because it was the best piece. This time my sister was devastated. In my family it is the women who are empowered by the ownership of jewelry and the ones in a position of authority to dole it out to subsequent generations.

For me, jewelry not only is something beautiful but also represents control. The more jewelry I own, the less dependent I am on anyone else. I do not hesitate to buy it for myself. It symbolizes my ability to take care of me. Aside from the traditional symbols of wealth and power, jewelry has other emotional aspects. Jewelry is magic. If we put on something that belonged to a mother or grandmother or great-grandmother, we take on characteristics of that person or even become the other person. Charms, amulets, those pieces that are supposed to ward off the evil eye, have an aura that is entirely different from a painting or other more traditional forms of art and craft.

Finally, jewelry is a way to express one's personality. The jewelry one wears makes an immediate statement to the outside world. In that famous article in *Metalsmith* (Summer 90), "Closing of Doors," Garth Clark said that certain clients were inclined to express their intellectual tastes on the wall rather than on their clothes. He described a particular couple who was comfortable buying avant-garde art but not jewelry. He doesn't have it quite right. I would say that those who do buy art jewelry are in fact willing and ready to reflect their intellectual tastes on their clothes. It is a way to express one's individuality. He also said somewhere in the same article that some were reluctant to buy art jewelry because they didn't have the right clothes. That argument doesn't hold up because a person with a passion for jewelry buys clothes as a background for the jewelry and not the other way around.

So people collect jewelry for all sorts of reasons. Where does acquisition end and connoisseurship begin? What makes one person a collector rather than someone who just hoards jewelry? Collectors study, do their homework, make an effort to find out who is being shown in museums, whose work has been acquired by museum collections or other collectors, familiarize themselves with technique, and in my opinion do not buy everything they see. Rather, they try to acquire fine examples of an artist's work and may decline to buy a particular artist, no matter how well thought of that artist is, if a specific work doesn't fit into the collection. A good collection has a point of view and reflects the aesthetic sensibility of the collector. (I will discuss my point of view in a few minutes.) Collectors can't always afford to buy a special piece immediately. I treasure those pieces that took me months to acquire, and I appreciate the galleries and artists who were willing to work with me.

One artist recently told me that acquiring with the hopes of a piece appreciating in value is the mark of a serious collector versus a semi-serious collector. Certainly that is part of my thought process. But every piece of every artist is not uniformly great, and that is where connoisseurship comes in. My own collection is small (at this point about 40 pieces), and with the exception of very few early questionable acquisitions, it is choice. It has quality pieces in it. I list every piece, hold on to receipts and am delighted that three pieces from my collection have been in museum shows.

I may have been moved to start my collection because of emotional issues, but my art jewelry collecting also satisfies intellectual needs. First, collecting contemporary jewelry requires study. Second, there's something wonderful about owning something made by hand. Once one owns a couple of pieces of contemporary art jewelry, the commercial stuff looks ordinary and bland. It doesn't feel nearly as good to wear it. Third, in a wonderful piece of art jewelry, there's line, form, color and texture, all of the traditional design elements. Fourth, jewelry is tactile. One can get involved with it. Fifth, there is something very satisfying in knowing that one can wear a piece of art. Yes, I believe that a great piece of art jewelry is art.

Why does a collector choose contemporary jewelry rather than some of the other schools? For me, Victorian jewelry is well designed and has great workmanship, but it is fussy, repressed and overly decorated. And it reminds me of my grandmothers. Art nouveau and art deco are interesting but not for me. Those schools are fun to look at and admire on others, but I don't respond to them. I have examined Bakelite bracelets, marcasite pins and the art moderne costume jewelry from the '40s. Anyone who loves jewelry likes to look at everything, but I've never really wanted to own jewelry from those eras. Contemporary art jewelry is more exciting to me. I love examining many examples of an artist's work and agonizing over my choice. I can pick something that represents that artist's technique or style. Art jewelry is within reach economically. And it's exciting. It's what is happening now.

I do not buy haphazardly. A piece of jewelry has to conform to my shopping list of requirements. If a piece doesn't fulfill almost every item on the list, I don't purchase it.

The most important criterion for me is, is it wearable? Garth Clark, in the same article I mentioned before, said that one problem with the art jewelry in his gallery was that the "work didn't take the site into consideration." Translated into English, that means the pieces in his gallery didn't work on the body. He is right about that. A necklace has to feel good on the neck, a bracelet can't have too many angles, and a brooch has to look right on a lapel or dress. Rings and earrings have to be comfortable as well. I don't appreciate fighting with findings, and I don't like being poked or otherwise attacked by my jewelry either. Owning jewelry is supposed to be pleasurable and not a source of physical pain. If I have to struggle more than 30 seconds with a clasp or worry about the sturdiness of a finding, I don't buy the piece.

I am interested in originality and a strong design statement. Is the piece substantially different from something I already own? There's a lot out there that's mediocre. I am always looking for that special piece and usually something with movement. The piece has to maintain my interest. I don't want to be bored.

Size matters. I'm 5 feet 6 inches. If it's scaled too small, I don't buy it. On the other hand, I don't like my jewelry to wear me or overshadow me. I don't buy a piece that is too massive either. Generally, however, big is better than small. I want a piece that looks significant.

I am partial to certain material. I love enamel, gold, silver and some stones. I love pearls, whether they are cultured, baroque, mobé pearls or South Sea pearls. I don't particularly care for titanium or married metals.

Color has an impact. I don't like brown, beige or orange. A piece doesn't have to have color, however. I am attracted to sculptural pieces and interesting shapes.

The weight of a piece is important. I don't like anything that feels tinny. I like substance, something that feels durable.

I am happiest when I have a choice of many examples of an artist's work. Then I can pick a piece that is most representative. I generally respond to abstract designs, sleek lines, organic forms, some geometric forms and surface texture. I have only two figurative pieces; I am not generally attracted to images of people, and that is another distinguishing characteristic of my particular collection.

If status and a display of wealth were the sole purpose of a jewelry collection, then selection would not be that difficult. Precious gems and almost any commercial design would do. It is an intellectual need that is satisfied by the research and legwork required in the acquisition of a contemporary jewelry collection.

The gallery is the first stop for me. Whenever I am in a new city, I try to find a gallery that carries contemporary art jewelry. Museums and museum catalogs from shows are another source of education. I like to look at everything, and I do a lot more looking than buying. Craft shows like New Art Forms are treasures.

I started making beaded necklaces in the early seventies and began acquiring a library of jewelry books then. I need to understand historical references. I also have books on tribal jewelry. I devour *Metalsmith, Ornament* and *American Craft* when they arrive. I want to see what's new, what is being shown in galleries and what the critics have to say so that I can disagree with them and decide what is right for my collection.

I don't always buy immediately. Sometimes I have to go home and look for examples of an artist's work in one of the craft magazines or my books. I have gone as long as three years without making a decision, waiting for the right piece of a particular artist to come along, once I determine that I want to own a piece by a certain artist. In the final analysis, the piece has to speak to me. I have to feel passionate about it, have that feeling of lust that overcomes collectors of any medium. If an artist's work doesn't move me, I don't buy it, regardless of critical opinion.

Debate among academicians about whether art jewelry is an art or craft is endlessly fascinating but only mildly relevant to me as a collector. I read everything I can get my hands on, but I believe that an object of beauty, fine workmanship and great design will hold up. I buy it because it gives me pleasure. It's something I can touch, look at, be involved with and enjoy wearing. From a collector's point of view, I would advise artists to concern themselves with the wearability of a piece and good design rather than whether the work is categorized as art or craft. I read Susan Kingsley's piece, "Jewelry: It's Not a Pretty Picture" *(Metalsmith,* Summer 91), with great interest. She ended a thoughtful article with the following quote: "Jewelry provides ritual objects for paying homage to the patriarchy. Jewelry is not about love and beauty; it is about power. Jewelry symbolizes the unequal positions of women and men in our culture. It symbolizes men's claim to intellectual superiority and women's supposedly primitive nature. It serves as a visual reminder of men's economic power and women's dependence upon men." I agree with many of her points in the article. Certainly Kingsley's opinion is valid as it applies to traditional commercial pieces of jewelry and flashy gemstones. As my plain-speaking grandfather used to say, a man shows his wealth by displaying it on his wife. After all, he can't wear the jewelry himself. He made that quote at a time when men didn't wear jewelry.

But art jewelry is not about greed and status. It is more subtle than traditional jewelry. I agree that jewelry is about power, but the contemporary jewelry movement is shifting the source of power. Men may be making jewelry, but women are commissioning it and buying it for themselves; a woman purchasing her own jewelry is asserting her independence, aesthetic sensibility and confidence about her taste. My collection expresses who I am, my interpretation of beauty and good design, and announces to the world that I am in control of me.

What will happen to the collection when I am no longer around? I have three daughters. I have instructed them to divide it up and donate what they don't want to a museum. My greatest fear, of course, is that they won't want any of it. I have heard the following more than once: "You aren't going out in public wearing that, are you?"

If my problem is educating my daughters, then the problem of contemporary craftspeople is educating the public. A massive PR effort is necessary. Craftspeople need to lecture, create opportunities to promote their work and participate in symposiums like this one. More galleries need to carry fine examples of contemporary art jewelry.

I'd like to conclude by saying that I do believe the beautiful objects being made today will eventually be accepted as "art" by the academic community. Because I feel that a well-designed piece of jewelry endures over time, I plan to continue to add to my collection slowly and carefully. I enjoy wearing my art.

Jan Yager

I would like to share some observations on a subject we are all obviously passionate about or we would not have ventured so far, so early in the day, to get here. My hope is that more can be accomplished collectively than any one of us could accomplish alone, and that this may contribute to the discussion.

We are the only animals on Planet Earth that feel a need to adorn ourselves! Considering how jewelry is interwoven with the entire history of mankind and womankind, we might expect art history books to be filled with examples. When I studied art history in school, I found that jewelry and the other crafts were rarely mentioned. Had I known then that jewelry was present in every culture, of every time period, in every part of the world, I would have questioned the omission. It wasn't until much later – about the same time someone noticed the absence of women artists in the art books – that I got suspicious. It had never occurred to me that Neolithic rock necklaces might exist from the same time period as the Venus of Willendorf!

There are a multitude of possible reasons for this oversight. It may be jewelry's size, in a culture that's come to measure greatness by the yard. Or perhaps it is its function as symbol of wealth, power and status. Or it may be that its intimate relationship to the body will forever hinder it from loftier achievement. Perhaps it is the result of a Europe-centered bias, or it may be just plain old sexism. What I am safely going to guess now is that these books were written by white men who didn't wear jewelry.

The lack of status that we in the jewelry field must contend with is, I believe, deeply entwined with the lack of status of women in our culture. As a result, "female things," things like jewelry, and in a broader sense things like art, are diminished in their value. My hunch is this "glass ceiling" jewelers now confront will not shatter quickly. But it is my belief we must confront and address these issues in order to understand and go beyond them.

I have noticed that many artists and art historians complete their education without a moment's thought about jewelry as art. The general public spends even less time making that connection. And jewelers themselves begin with little of the historical foundation that seems to be such a long-established and valued part of the other arts. Is it any wonder we are misunderstood by the general public (who get their notion of jewelry from advertising), underrepresented in museum collections and suffer from a lack of critical attention?

WHAT TO DO?

Taking all of this into consideration, none of us can afford less than the highest standards! Artists, do your *best work yet.* Patrons and galleries, seek it out or, better yet, *sponsor it.* Help document our field: photograph your work, your studio, your home, your wardrobe, your exhibitions, your collections. Record your thoughts and experiences, offer these to slide banks, libraries, archives. *Let's establish a major comprehensive collection of jewelry somewhere in the USA.*

Let's not be the only ones who understand and love what we do. One percent for the arts is not too much to ask of the media. Let's infiltrate television newscasts, radio programs, mainstream magazines, daily newspapers. I am convinced art is vastly more interesting than much of the blather in the media now. Lobby for the incorporation of design, art and craft into our educational system. Do this as an individual or collectively through schools, arts councils and guilds. Then learn to count. If no one notices when women are underrepresented, what makes you think they will suddenly notice there is no jewelry, no craft? SNAG's membership is about 60 percent female; if *anything* to do with our field does not have female representation, ask why. If jewelry is excluded or underrepresented in competitions, exhibitions or permanent collections, speak up. Learn to write postcards and letters, recognize and take steps toward larger goals.

HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN WE HAVE GOTTEN THERE?

For me it will be when the art section of the newspaper is as thick as the sports section; it will also be when art museums include as much jewelry in their exhibitions as they do in their fundraisers. Will I have to wait long for the time when jewelers (and not architects and movie stars) are asked to design jewelry?

I will also know we are there when equal numbers of men and women are in positions of authority and decision making, exhibiting, teaching, speaking, writing, jurying, in major arenas. When *all* of us are represented fairly, each of us is in our rightfully earned place in society.

Judith Mitchell is a writer living in Cranston, RI.

Bruce Metcalf is a frequent contributor to Metalsmith.

Kathryn Sackheim is a collector who lives in Highland Park, IL.

Jan Yager is an artist/jeweler living in Philadelphia.

Books

Contemporary American Jewelry Design
by Ettagale Blauer
New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1991
Clothbound, $39.95

As its title states, *Contemporary American Jewelry Design* covers a special movement. It defines studio goldsmithing, its place in the jewelry field and its impact on the commercial jewelry world. I am unaware of any other text devoted to this topic, but after we are all dead and buried, other historical writers will attempt to sift out what happened, who was important and who was not. This book dares take a stand now, and while mistakes may occur, we at least have the opportunity to redress the issue while its participants are still alive.

The book is absolutely beautiful in all respects, from its gorgeous jacket to its heavy coated paper with ample white space; from its large readable text to its 189 color photos, many of which are full page. The book accomplishes what its jacket proclaims: "presents in-depth profiles of many of today's leading studio goldsmiths, the work of dozens more, a wide array of techniques, and a dazzling portfolio of photographs [and traces] the growth of today's more independent and innovative jewelry-making community—through its luminaries, crafts fairs, associations, and galleries." It is dedicated to the studio goldsmiths and their work.

Some of the roots of the resurgence of the art jewelry movement are covered, from the origins of the large craft shows to today's noted jewelry galleries. Of particular interest is the beginning of Rhinebeck, which is amazingly close to Woodstock, and similarly the founding of a whole new generation of craft fair markets. American Craft Enterprises rules and regulations are outlined (for instance, the individual artist must personally attend his or her booth to ensure personal contact with customers) and the ACE jurying system explained in nerve-racking detail. We learn how some artists job out their entire lines, only having created the first piece, while others hire scores of apprentices. Story after story reveals different production and marketing ideas and approaches, and an entire chapter is devoted to descriptions and histories of the leading jewelry galleries.

Unfortunately, the book just scratches the surface of the resurgence and leaves its audience desiring more information. In actuality, this renaissance can be traced back to the years immediately following World War II, when the real explosion in crafts occurred in the colleges and universities. It was only after all the teaching jobs were filled that craft artists had to seek other career opportunities, creating the resurgence described in the book. Other information could also have been better documented; for instance, the book states that the refractory metal revolution was a "most dynamic and dramatic experiment to try new materials," yet fails to detail the invasion of the English artists Ward and DeLarge, who first discovered and promoted its use.

One section will be of particular interest to students and teachers alike, since it provides the definition of an ideal teacher: "a guide and mentor, not an example to clone." Teaching, says the author, "requires nurturing of the student and a surrender of the teacher's ego." Blauer believes that few teachers manage this balance, and probably she is correct. While this section features many instructors of high caliber, unfortunately a whole generation is missing, including Richard Thomas, Kenneth Bates, Heikki Seppä, Brent Kington and others.

Luna Felix
Pueblo Shards necklace
22K gold with granulation;
amethyst clasp executed in collaboration
with Curtis Woods, 1987

The entire book blends the artistic and commercial jewelry worlds together, a necessity for artists who earn their living from their work. The featured artists represent this fusion in a great variety of methods. As Blauer states, "The entrance of these jewelers into this most commercial marketplace was seen as an intrusion by some of the older established manufacturers. All they could see was a profligate waste of energy, odd mixes of metals and stones, and jewelry that didn't fit neatly into categories.... the commercial goal was 'thinner, lighter, cheaper.'" Thus, the revolution began.

The bulk of the book is a series of mini-sections featuring leading artist-goldsmiths who, in Blauer's opinion, not only have "staying power" but whose work she liked. She freely confesses that while "there may be as many statements as there are jewelers, for me, the first statement must be beauty, and that is the criterion by which I have selected this work.... I have gravitated toward work that is not on the cutting edge.... It is not... extreme... though it does look that way when viewed from the perspective of the traditional, mass producer of jewelry."

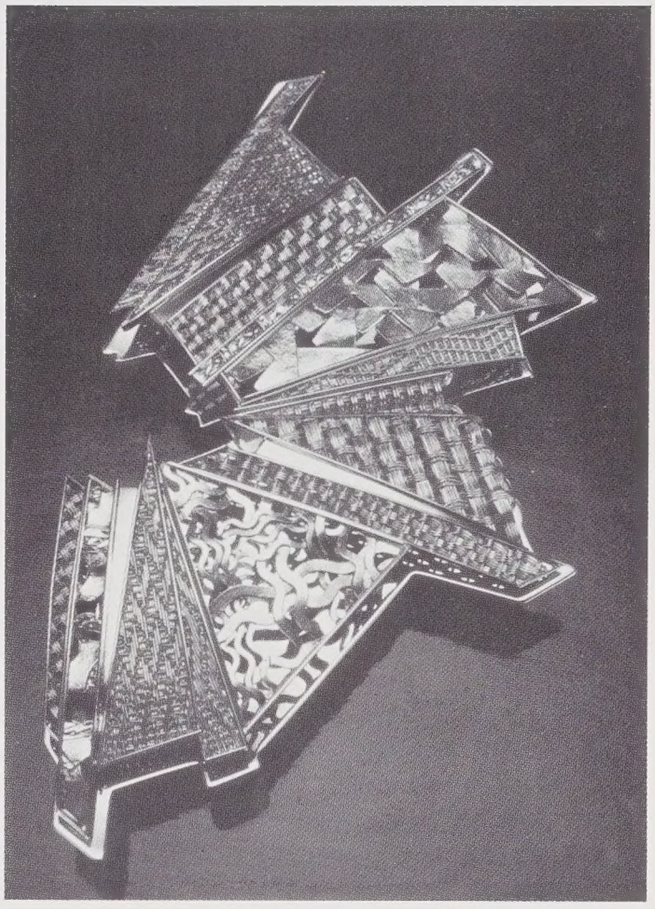
Many familiar artists are featured, as well as some unknowns. Blauer describes their work, roots, techniques, philosophies, preferences, ideas, markets, gallery relationships, production lines and more. Many of the artists are grouped into technical categories that obviously intrigue the author: cloisonné, granulation, fusion surfaces, mokumé patterns and high-karat gold. These sections contain a wealth of technical ideas and information that should greatly assist and stimulate other goldsmiths.

The appendixes include listings of schools, workshops, galleries, organizations, craft shows and publications. The epilogue details a jewel box by Jane Campbell that can be disassembled into a bracelet, brooch, earrings and stick pin. In actuality, this entire book is like the author's jewel box containing all her favorite artists, techniques, ideas, materials and work that is changing the contemporary jewelry of the U.S. By restricting this book to her favorites, however, she limits the documentation of this movement. While she captures its essence, we are left hungering for more.

The author has true vision, which she has transformed into words and pictures. Her vision extends into all areas, including artistic attitudes, personal philosophies and marketing techniques. The manner in which she approaches these topics is refreshing, revealing and insightful. There are some heavy statements on which we could spend hours reflecting: for instance, "For jewelers, gold and silver are paint" or "The studio goldsmith relishes technique, it's a challenge rather than a burden" or "Why should sculptors, who develop their ideas through physical processes into hard three-dimensional forms, merit the title artist, when jewelers, who follow the same process but on a smaller scale, do not?"

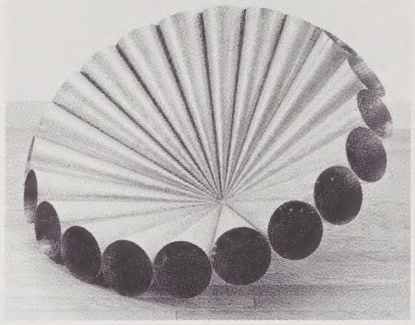
All things considered, this book is superb and may trigger other authors to more fully document the contemporary metal movement. I am reminded of the statement that the best artists use the best materials, and in this case the book is the author's art. It truly is first class and unique as it explores and explains various issues confronting contemporary jewelry in a manner that only an educated visionary could.

— Mark Baldridge

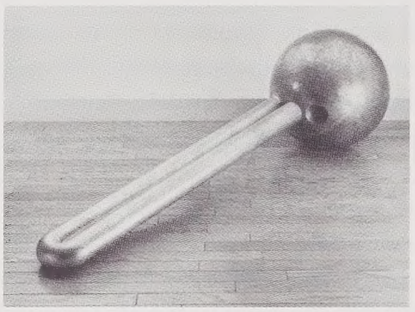


Stuart Golder
Burst brooch
18K gold, 1989

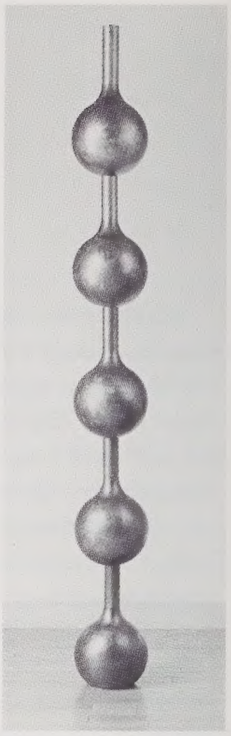
Reviews



Cones (21), copper, 24 x 55", 1992



Klein
copper, 24 x 84 x 24", 1992



Five Bottles
copper, 112 x 12", 1992

Jonathan Bonner

Peter Joseph Gallery
New York, New York
April 2 – May 2, 1992

by Lynn Brunelle

To explore and describe the world we live in is human nature. To better understand our world and ourselves, some of us observe, measure and record as scientists; others look, touch and create as artists. We grow up believing the two approaches to be opposite. Jonathan Bonner's new work exhibited at the Peter Joseph Gallery in New York combines these viewpoints using form, texture and technique to show us an elegant, simple unity between art and science.

A decided departure from his whimsical weathervanes and alligator candlesticks, Bonner's new work breathes life into the cool abstractions of geometric form and scientific vessels. Through ideas reminiscent of the Mobius strip, soap bubble and honeycomb, Bonner's large copper and brass vessels explore the mathematician's passion for planar continuity, the physicist's love of the competing forces of interior vs. exterior and the biologist's reverence for cellular organization. Painted diagrams adorn the walls of the gallery as evidence of Bonner's explicitness about these relationships.

Klein is an abstraction of a Klein bottle. A Klein bottle – named for the German mathematician Felix Klein, who worked with the idea of infinity – is a one-sided topological surface having no inside or outside. At first glance, it appears to be a sphere with a hole and a long U-shaped tube attached to it, like a trombone slide. Upon closer examination, the viewer sees that the hole is actually a continuation of the tube, making the inside surface continuous with the outside surface. This idea is also the basis for *Bottle* and *Inverted Bottle*, whose outsides are actually insides.

Five Bottles is based roughly on a medieval distilling apparatus. What comes to the eye of the viewer of this stack of bottles is not its function, but how absolutely lovely it is as a form. The walls of the vessel are a delicately balanced boundary between the interior and exterior forces, like that of a soap bubble.

The cellular nature of things is reflected in *Cones (21)*, in which 21 identical cones are bolted together to form a larger cone. Bonner's inspiration comes from the structure of the honeycomb, in which a larger whole is made up of smaller, similar components. This is evident in *Cones (9)* as well.

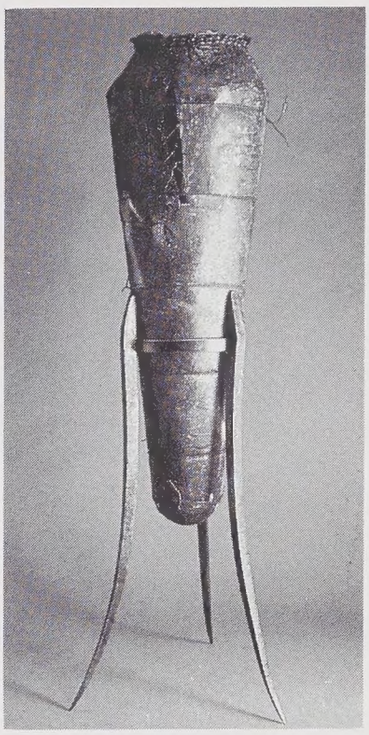
Bonner's use of bare metal, hammer marks, ground texture, rivets, bolts and exposed seams makes the viewer keenly aware of the artist's hand. His obvious presence transforms the scientific abstraction, be it mathematical, physical or biological, resulting in the union of science and art.

This exhibit, elegantly presented, echoed a shifting of view from the practicality of function to the beauty of form, joining them in a practical, poetic marriage. Jonathan Bonner allows the observer a chance to ponder, for a while, a unique exploration of a world we think we already know.

Lynn Brunelle is a metalsmith, writer and editor. She lives in New York City.

Offering Bowl
copper and patina
raised and fabricated
10 x 23 x 27", 1992

LEFT
Bound
copper and patina
raised and fabricated
14 x 12 x 12", 1991



Chrysalis
copper, steel and patina
raised, fabricated and forged
39 x 9 x 8", 1992

Robert Coogan

Albers Fine Arts Gallery
Memphis, Tennessee
March 6 – April 11, 1992

by Carol Martin

Walking into the show of Robert Coogan's copper vessels at the Albers Fine Arts Gallery in Memphis was a bit like entering a partially understood sanctuary in a distant land. Standing in the middle of the room, viewers were surrounded by pieces that might hold offerings to the gods, relics of martyred saints or ancient peoples or a profoundly simple and mysterious silence. The stately, sometimes classical forms have a lyricism that begged the eye to move around the room, traveling slowly over the sensuous surfaces, pausing on occasion to question or reflect. Where have they come from, what secrets do they hold, what messages do they attempt to convey?

Coogan's work transcends the line between the functional or utilitarian and the concept of the vessel as pure sculpture. Seen together, these pieces evoke a sense of place that exists outside time; the strong responsive feelings elicited from the viewer lend themselves to contemplation. Coogan uses chemicals like a watercolorist, creating sensitively patinated surfaces that are subtle, quick, instinctive. The color lends elegance (the fluid blues and greens of *Sentinel*), a sense of place (the floor of a shallow inlet seen through water in *Sea Bowl*) or a mood (the bold deep blue of *Chrysalis*, an emergent form filled with assurance; or the subtle, half-vanished greens and browns of *Torso*, which evoke memories of unearthed Egyptian tombs).

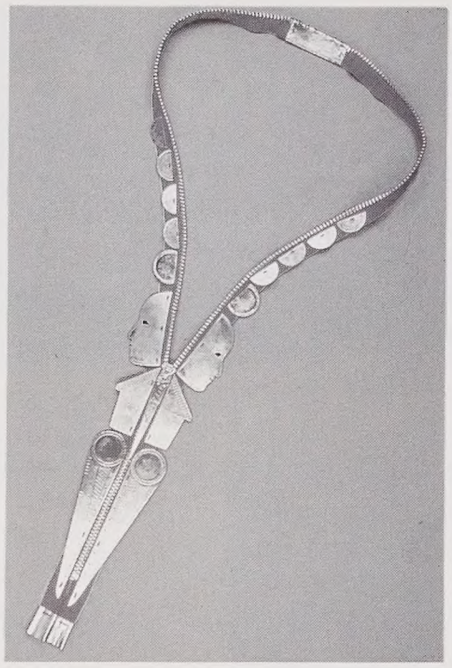
There are few people working on this scale in the vessel form, and much of the work I have seen has seemed highly structured and well thought out before execution. Coogan's vessels seem to have evolved intuitively, beginning with a reference: to form (the Summerian lines of *Chrysalis*), a way of life (Indian pottery of the American Southwest in *Bound*), a concept of worship (*Offering Bowl*, with its deep, open surface washed with varied greens, blues and browns suggests Proteus, the continually changing sea god of the Odyssey, while *Offering Stones* with its plow disk form designed to hold fire seems to refer to both Gia and Oranos). I had the feeling that Coogan began with an idea or concept that evolved and ripened while the work was in progress. His vessels seem to defy the structured traditions of metal by showing off the fluid qualities inherent in copper as well as its unique ability to respond to color.

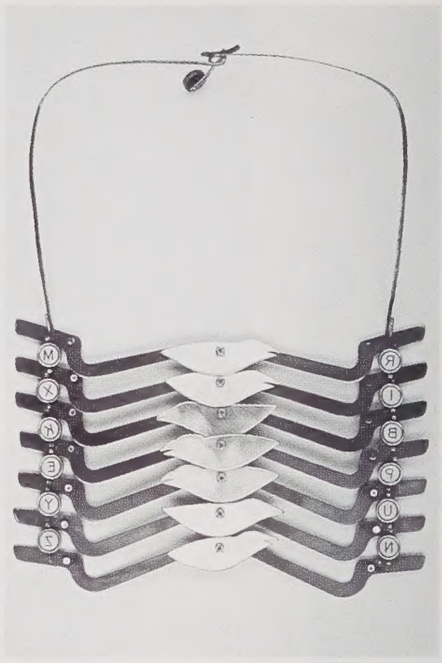
Coogan's vessels are clearly about inquiry. In his artist's statement he describes his interest in "primitive" or archaic cultures and his fascination with the questions raised, through the excavation of relics, about these cultures. His vessels seem particularly relevant in a society in which the past often extends no further than one's grandparents and mystery usually means the latest suspense film. *Bound*, with the form and burnished black-brown color of rich, primitive-fired Pueblo clay pots, can be read as a container for the ideas and spirits of that nation. The sacred circle, made of twisted wire, tightly binds the chest, and the vessel in its fullness seems close to bursting. We might have learned how to live on this planet from a people who felt all things were connected and that man was merely a strand in the web of life.

Robert Coogan seems equally at home in fine jewelry, knifemaking and hollowware. In all these areas he combines exquisitely simple and graceful form with sensuous surface. His knives, often using mokumé-gane or Damascus steel, become pieces of sculpture that one would hesitate to use.

While these vessels look to the past, they break tradition with their free and lyrical spirit and discover new ways to work in the future. They seem an attempt to understand other cultures not so much on an intellectual or artistic level as on a spiritual or emotional plane. In doing so, they evoke a sense of wonder – about the past, about ourselves today.

Carol Martin is a potter who lives and works in Smithville, Tennessee.





Kiff Slemmons

Susan Cummins Gallery
Mill Valley, California
February 1992

by Dorothy Spencer

LEFT TO RIGHT

Seance neckpiece
vinyl record, silver, bronze and copper, 1991

Romance neckpiece
dress zipper and bronze, 1991

Breastplate
typewriter keys, silver and bronze, 1990

From Masai flat-beaded neck discs to Sioux breastplates, Kiff Slemmons' jewelry that was on view during February at the Susan Cummins Gallery in Mill Valley, California, suggests the tribal art of numerous primitive cultures. Some pieces are instantly recognizable, while others are more subtle in their allusions to ancient civilizations, remnants of obscure societies – totems of their rituals and religions.

Closer inspection provides startling revelations. These necklaces, pins and assorted body adornments reflect the tribal art of a more complex contemporary society. Made from a wide range of both precious and common metals in combination with discarded and found objects, they suggest multiple meanings – affiliations with the more recent past.

Seance, a wide, collar-like disc reminiscent of those worn by Masai tribesmen, is made from a long-playing vinyl record. The rim of its inner circle is trimmed in bronze. Sterling silver and copper silhouettes of hands and indecipherable scribblings, along with a bronze silhouette of a face, are meticulously pressed into the disc's surface, evoking an overall sense of mysticism.

Another piece, *Protection*, according to the artist's statement, is the first piece in her "Homage to the Ethnic Jewelry Ancestors." She states, "The Sioux breastplates of bone have long attracted and moved me both as ornament and symbol – the idea of wearing ribs on the outside" (thus the name). In the case of *Protection*, however, the bones of the breastplate are used yellow pencils. Woven together with horsehair and brass fittings, the breastplate, like its antecedents, has small objects such as mirrors, bits of deerskin, brass and coins attached to its "bones." One of the ornaments, an Indian head nickel, reiterates its native origins, the word *liberty* on the coin's face reminding the viewer of the ironies of the fate of the Sioux tribe.

Continuing with the breastplate theme, the artist has created similarly designed pieces from other relics of the not-too-distant past: typewriter keys and striking pins from early manual typewriters. When taken out of their original context, these skeletons of primitive mechanization are quite beautiful. The artist has cleverly incorporated the inner workings of these old machines into several sculptural neckpieces, combining silver, bronze and gold wiring with intricately cut silver shapes, providing grist for further interpretations.

An even further extension of societal ornament/comment can be seen in *Romance*, an innovatively designed neckpiece basically made from a long heavy-duty dress zipper. When closed or "zipped," the cut bronze objects that are so deftly attached to each of the zipper's cloth sides come together to reveal a head, house, heart and several coins – perhaps a statement to the ease in which these stalwarts of everyday life can be split apart.

Incorporating objects ranging from antique brass rulers to porcelain shards, Venetian glass to beach flotsam, Kiff Slemmons' work is refreshingly individualistic. She uses literal and visual puns to create a very personal style of jewelry that is exceptional on many levels.

The intended meanings and relationships between the design of the pieces and the viewer's response are filled with subtle ironies as well as humor. The reinterpretation of ancient forms and themes is certainly not a new idea, but the artist's approach is unique. For those who have the opportunity to view Kiff Slemmons' work, it is a thought-provoking and visually rewarding experience.

Dorothy Spencer, an art consultant living in Philadelphia, is the author of Total Design *(Chronicle Books, 1991).*

RIGHT
Cruciform Chalice
copper electroform, fine gold plate, 1991

FAR RIGHT
Decisions
pewter, steel, bronze and wood, 1992

Matthew Hollern

University of Wisconsin – Madison
Class of 1925 Gallery
March 6 – April 3, 1992

By Paulette Werger

Rooted in hollowware tradition, Matthew Hollern's pieces are biomorphic forms, carefully executed and ranging in size from 1 to 6 feet. His work functions on two levels. Derived from a love of materials, it explores the plastic nature of pewter, frequently pushing the limits of scale. In addition, besides being aesthetically pleasing, the work is designed to stimulate the mind. This is accomplished by the use of visual puns, abstraction and metaphor.

Conception, fabricated in pewter, combines a sinuous tapered speculum with an indented hemisphere. Stretching out about 3 feet horizontally, the head of the taper nestles into a soft rounded cushion. The piece has the appearance of both a sprout and a spermatozoon, an intentional mixing of meanings, as both words are derived from the same Greek root. The piece quietly speaks of the gentle moment of conception as well as that of growth. Furthermore, it draws a direct relationship between these processes and the creation of an artistic object. The concern for craftsmanship is also communicated in this minimal form through flawless execution and a consistent mat surface.

Silhouette in Bronze uses metaphor along with a somewhat quirky sense of proportion to allude to the human form. This 23-inch-tall vessel has a V-collar for its upper rim, then makes a graceful transition into shoulders and belly and finally diminishes to a small heavy foot. The urn-shaped vessel is bisected vertically by two wavy elements of forged bronze. These elements cut through the vessel, suggesting a head and cleanly outlining both the shoulders and hips of a torso. They also serve as a color contrast and visually elevate the vessel from the tabletop. It seems as if the urn would float, were the heavy foot removed.

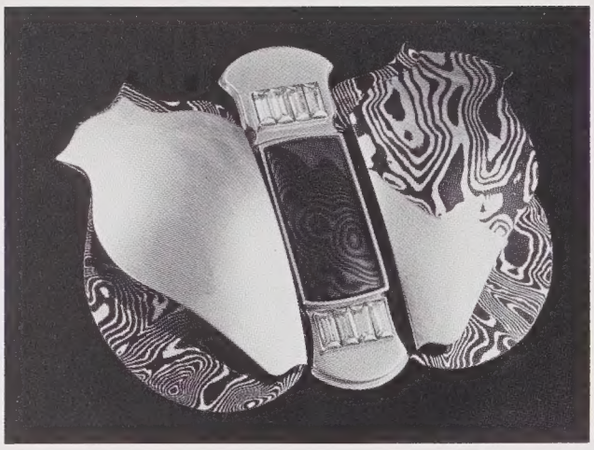
Cruciform Chalice visually integrates the symbols of the Eucharist with the function of serving holy communion. The support for the chalice is a stylized cross of textured copper which has the appearance of hand-hewn wood. Suspended from the cruciform is a patinated figure with outstretched arms holding up the goblet bowl. The bowl of the chalice becomes the head of the figure, and the interior gold plating acts as a halo of sorts. The contrast of gold against sea green and burnt umber is visually exciting and emphasizes the individual elements of the piece.

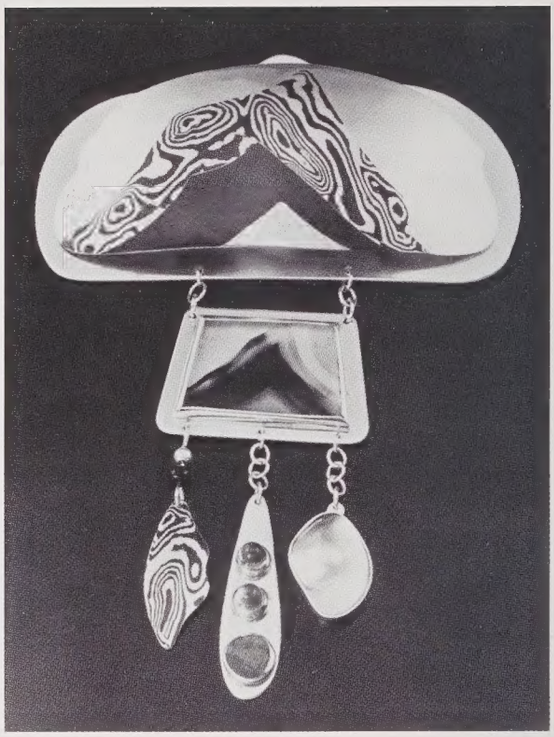
Decisions epitomizes Hollern's concerns about the exploration of ideas. This most recent work relies less heavily upon the traditions of hollowware and addresses more the artistic concerns of sculpture. Over 4 feet in height and length, it combines steel, wood, pewter and bronze. A center needle rises from a wedge-shaped rocker. On one side of the rocker rests a pewter heart, while on the opposite side rests a stylized brain. The piece evokes the need to strike a balance between the joy of simply working materials and the concepts which they are capable of communicating. No matter how far tilted, the sculpture always returns to a center position of balance between the extremes of head and heart.

The frontal display of work around the perimeter of the gallery prevented the viewer from experiencing the sculpture and hollowware in the round. The strength of this show is the technical tour de force combined with the conceptual basis of Matthew Hollern's work.

Paulette Werger is a metalsmith living in Madison, WI.

Ornament brooch
14K gold, silver, psilomelane,
baguettes (cubic zirconia)
mokumé-gane (kuromido and silver)
4½ x 3½ x ½"





Sea Nettle Series #3 brooch
silver and exotic metals, Montana agate,
citrine, pearl, boulder opal
mokumé-gane (kuromido and silver)
3½ x 7½ x ½"

Rosemary Gould

Creative Metalsmiths Gallery
Chapel Hill, NC
April 1992

by Stephen Walker

Rosemary Gould's show at Creative Metalsmiths Gallery was more an exhibit of precious objects than of jewelry. Most of the 23 works displayed are jewelry pieces designed to be worn. The attitude apparent to this observer is that the artist is working more in the tradition of object maker than of jeweler.

Gould's materials are silver, mokumé-gane and semiprecious stones. Mokumé artists tend to be seen as technical masters, and in Gould's case this is certainly true. Mokumé assumes a precious material status through the magic of the technique. Her sensitive use of the material for its pattern and her composition with other patterned materials – stones and fabric – transcend the infatuation with technique that so often draws metalsmiths to pursue mokumé.

Among the stones the artist chooses to use is psilomelane. The patterns of grays and blacks in the stone are carried into the metal's color and pattern in the mokumé. The shield shapes in a series of brooches and earrings using bold symmetrical overlays have a regal, medieval look. While heavy and purposeful in their look, these objects are very wearable as jewelry.

Gould has a background in fiber. One of the most intriguing pieces in the show was *Pattern Portfolio.* The work is in several parts. There are four metal plates, each a married metal composition illustrating patterns and colors of various metals and patinas. These are contained in separate pockets in a batik silk purse patterned and made by the artist.

In one way the portfolio is a swatch book or sampler, but when given close consideration it reveals a lot about the artist and her potential. Each of the compositions is in itself a finished piece of art. None of the swatches are as strong as her jewelry designs, but a love of the metal and the patterns comes through that tells us this is made for its own sake. Perhaps a greater depth of experience on the part of the artist as jeweler accounts for the greater mastery of design in the jewelry. The appreciation of the wearer is a powerful motivator for the designer that accelerates the development of jewelry. The object for its own sake tends to be motivated by the soul of the artist. The audience is fortunate that Gould has been faithful to this part of her artistry.

The creation of the precious object for its own sake has an intimacy about it that tends to be neglected when craft artists respond to the more marketable forms of their calling. Rosemary Gould has held on to her object maker's sensibility throughout the total of her work. The intimate display space of Creative Metalsmith Gallery on Franklin Street in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, was an excellent venue for this enchanting show of a gifted metalsmith.

Stephen Walker is a metal artist in Andover, NY.

Harapan Jaya Indah brooch
copper and silver
7¼ x 2⅛ x ¾", 1989

Gryke necklace
copper, silver and tombac
14⅛ x 22½ x 1", 1989

Metal in Motion: Birgit Laken

Jewelerswerk Galerie
Washington, D.C.
March 5 – 26, 1992

by Lee Fleming

The spare elegance of Dutch artist Birgit Laken's mokumé-gane pins, brooches and necklaces belies both the effort and the hours expended on their creation. Organic allusions in her exquisitely worked shapes, which resemble spirals, pods and other natural forms, are matched by equally naturalistic patterns coaxed from the thinly beaten metal. The resulting visual metamorphosis, in which metal forms and graining ultimately suggest horn, shell, bone and even fur, encapsulates the wit and mystery of this evocative jewelry.

Although Laken confines herself to relatively few shapes in these series, the patterns evoked from the strips she gouges from mokumé metal blocks (*mokumé-gane* means "wood grain metal" in Japanese) provide infinite variety. Through intensive hammering, Laken controls the growth and direction of the metal and its markings. The paper-thin rippling of the edges of a spiral not only adds another degree of texture but also recalls the hours of smithing required for its making. Such vestiges, although nearly imperceptible, are powerful reminders of the artist's process.

In works such as *Tigerspiral*, a 1987 copper and tombac brooch, Laken's continuous hammering has produced a form that subtly spirals down as it spreads out, echoing the torque of the mokumé pattern continually rotating on its own axis. These shell-like brooches are secured by thin, waved metal strips.

By 1988, however, Laken had united the method of fastening with the pieces themselves, allowing the inner end of her spiral to "run off" in a thin, rippled line, like a rivulet from a pool. This integrated, diagonal pin "breaks" the graceful spiral while at the same time assuring its functionalism. The trick is neatly done, enhancing rather than compromising the central form.

In Laken's most recent brooches resembling seed pods or shells – secured by separate, rippled lengths of mokumé – the contrasts between densely patterned flat edge and unpatterned convex core, or vice versa, again highlight the artist's mastery of mokumé. Technically brilliant at creating precisely delineated patterned and plain areas from a single piece of layered metal, she is no less adept at allowing the motion suggested by the metal grain to develop. This exploitation of the medium's inherent possibilities invests shapes which otherwise would suggest calm and stasis with a new, intriguing dynamism.

Another series of recent brooches, such as *Black Head* and *Lickeen Lake*, evoke wave-scrubbed shoals, pea pods and even stylized insects at rest. Their pins become underpinnings, supporting the brooch when off the body much as a stand props up a leaning sculpture. Wearers can have them both ways: as fine art objects with built-in means of display and as ingeniously engineered objects of personal adornment.

Most dramatic of Laken's offerings are the necklaces of suspended, podlike forms. The elongated waves of the mokumé patterns that wash their surfaces are echoed in the ripples of the neck wires from which they hang like the minimalist breast plates of a nature-worshipping priestess. Suggesting amulets or badges of ritual office, the spare beauty of these refined yet earthy forms gently but pointedly mocks the memory of heavier, overdone breastplates and full-blown jeweled regalia. At the same time they convey a sense of alchemical mystery as the metal, shaped into natural forms, transcends its origins.

Lee Fleming, a freelance critic, writes for City Paper *in Washington and several national art publications.*

The 255-page exhibition catalog, *René Lalique,*
is available in this country in a limited edition clothbound version
from the Lalique Boutique, 680 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10021.
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Dragon Fly Corsage Ornament
gold, enamel, chrysoprase, diamonds, moonstone
created by René Lalique 1897–1898
Collection: Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon
Photo: Reinaldo Viegas, Lisbon

René Lalique Retrospective

Musée des Arts Décoratifs
Paris, France
February 1992

by Jan Yager

Nothing could have prepared me for that first encounter with René Lalique's jewelry at the 1976 Chicago Art Institute exhibition. I was awestruck by how adept he was with so many materials and processes, and the extraordinary amount of time he had to devote to each piece. Later I learned that he hired as many as 30 master craftspeople, with the accumulated skills of turn-of-the century Paris, to actualize his vision.

Enticed by low airfares to Paris, nothing could deter me from this second major encounter, his retrospective at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs. More than 250 works were assembled from public and private European collections spanning 1885 to 1934. Almost 100 were spectacular jewelry pieces fabricated primarily in gold, with enamel, glass, horn, ivory, opal and tourmaline. The rest were mainly glass works.

The installation was imposing, dark and dramatic, with each piece afforded ample space. Most admirably, each was displayed at the height it would have been seen on a wearer (hair combs above eye level, brooches and pendants below). The jewelry, however, needed to be placed closer to the glass to allow more intimate examination. The work itself is *much better* than any photo can communicate. The pieces I liked best were not available in press photos but had been held back for the sumptuous exhibition catalog (which I recommend).

Lalique was determined to create something "never seen before," and he reinforced his idea with unparalleled skill and a commitment to perfection. Many pieces are surprisingly large, perhaps influenced by their intended use in theater productions with Sarah Bernhardt. Some may be large simply because the maker and his patron, oil magnate Calouste Gulbenkian, knew they would be treasured but rarely worn, destined to be among the vast holdings of what is now the Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon, Portugal.

Lalique was obsessed with complexity and contrast. Why use simple round wire as links in a chain when twigs or violet blossoms wrapped around themselves would serve the same purpose? Why make the fronts interesting but not the backs? Why set a stone in a plain bezel when it could instead be held by intricately chased oak leaves? Some pieces such as the *Dragonfly Woman Corsage* have incredibly delicate wings of plique-à-jour enamel, yet hawk-like talons of gold ready to claw the breast of the wearer. The delicately carved horn *Hortensis Blossoms Hair Comb,* with touches of gold, enamel and diamonds, is the quintessence of beauty, though dead and wilted. Did he succeed in spotlighting beauty that one would never have recognized otherwise? Would wasps and beetles be allowed to encircle jewelry were they not so carefully rendered?

The exquisite gouache paintings in the show confirm Lalique as a consummate draftsman with a deep understanding of nature and a rich imagination. Obviously he explored ideas until they were fully developed on paper before he translated them into three-dimension. And like his contemporary Auguste Rodin, he approached his work as a sculptor. Ideas were modeled in clay, cast in bronze and, with the help of a reducing lathe, converted to jewelry scale.

The grotesque and the sublime coexist quite comfortably in Paris. One moment, overhanging gargoyles leer at you; the next, lovely carved stone nude women welcome you to a plaza. Seeing René Lalique's work in Paris, the city from which it came and in which he lived, added immensely to my understanding his work. But regardless of where or when you are able, I highly recommend you seek out his work in person and consider what is possible given unlimited imagination, skill, time (and support of a patron).

Jan Yager is an artist/jeweler living in Philadelphia.

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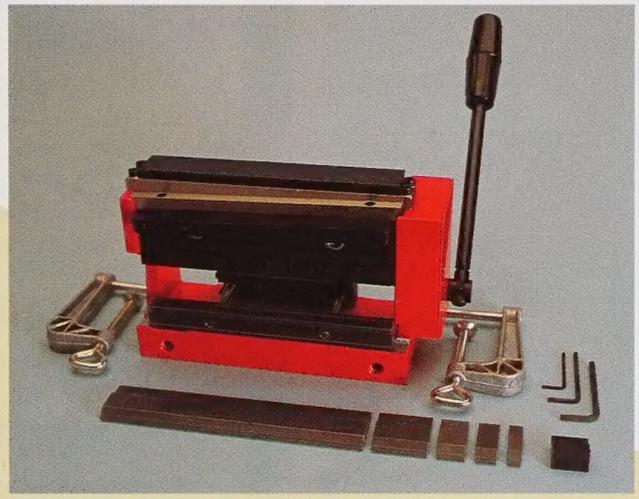

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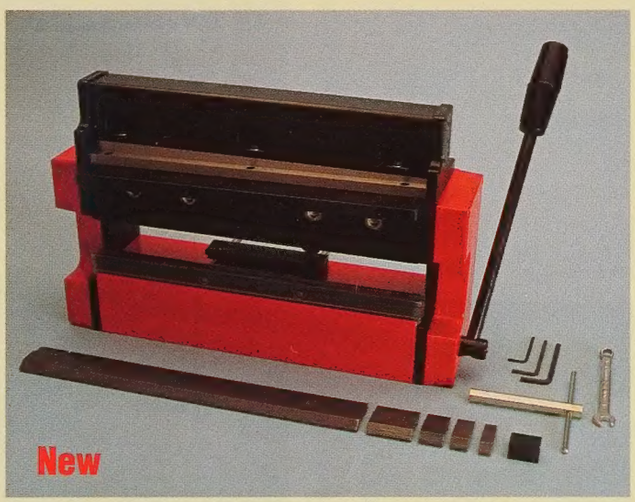

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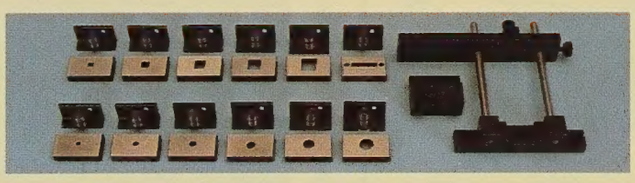

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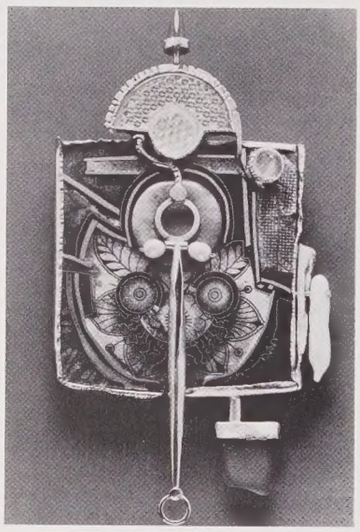

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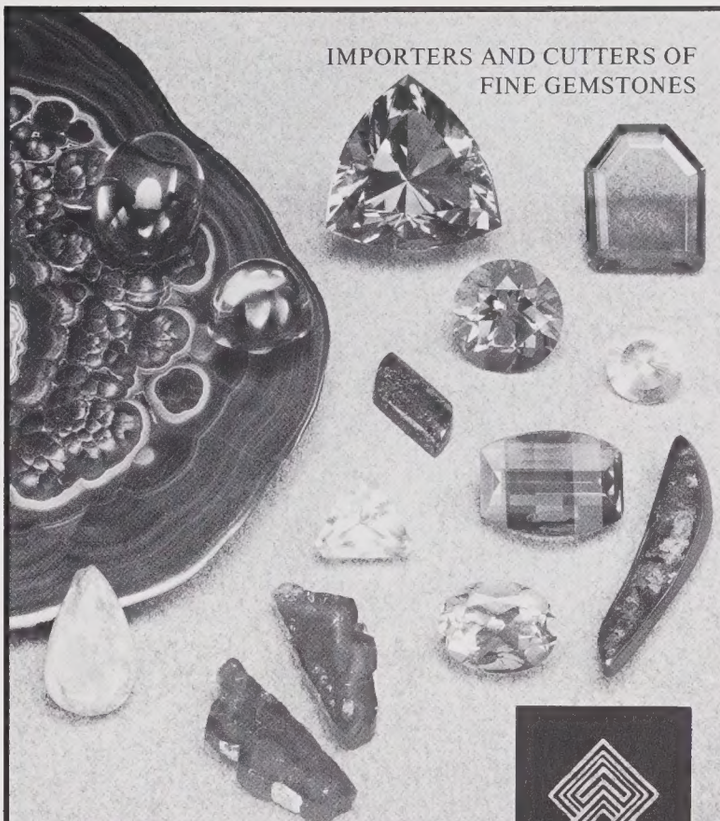

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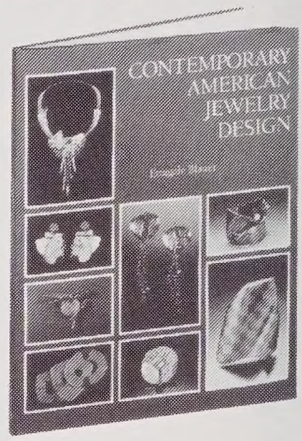

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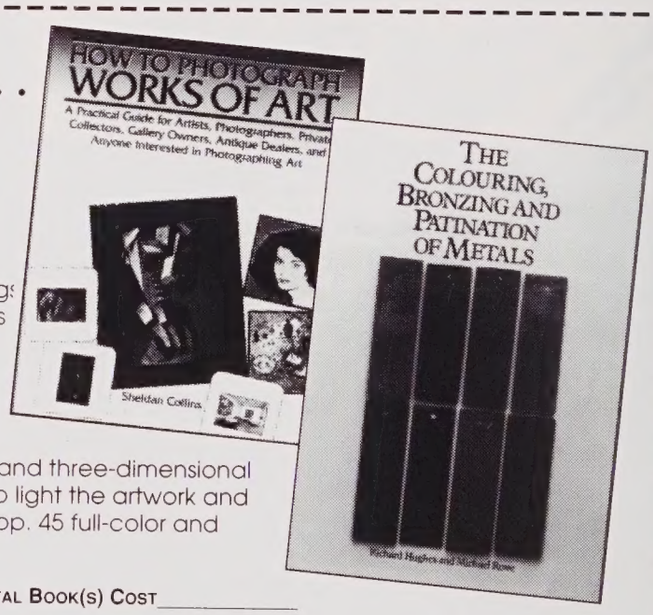
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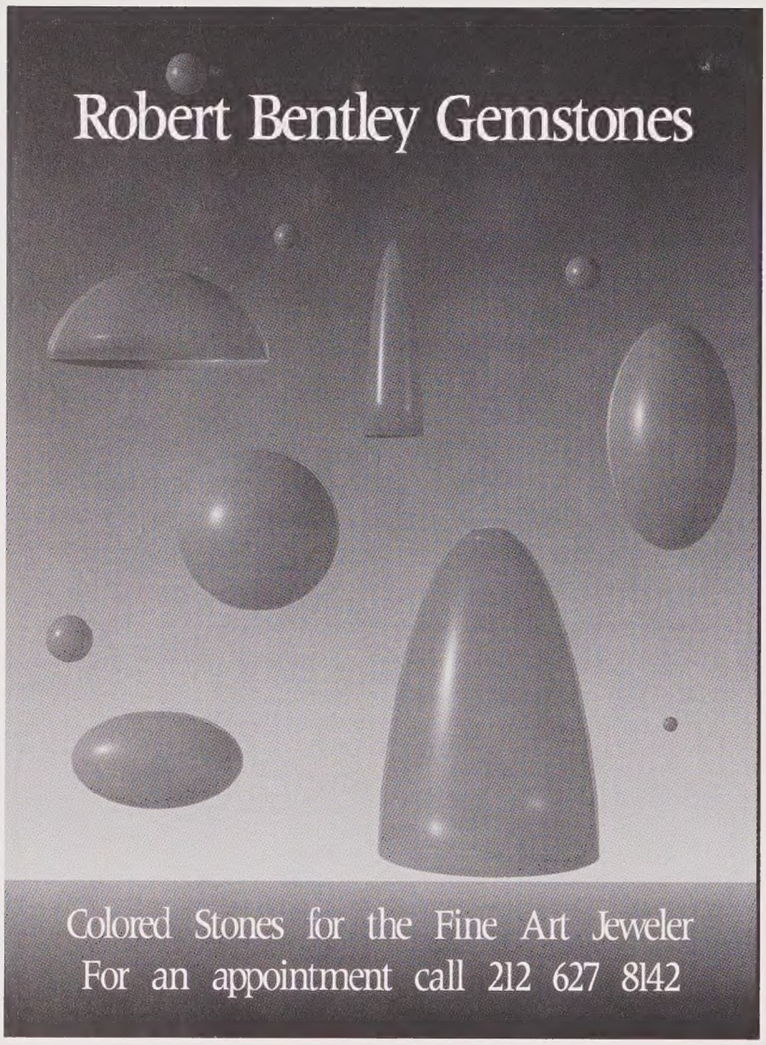

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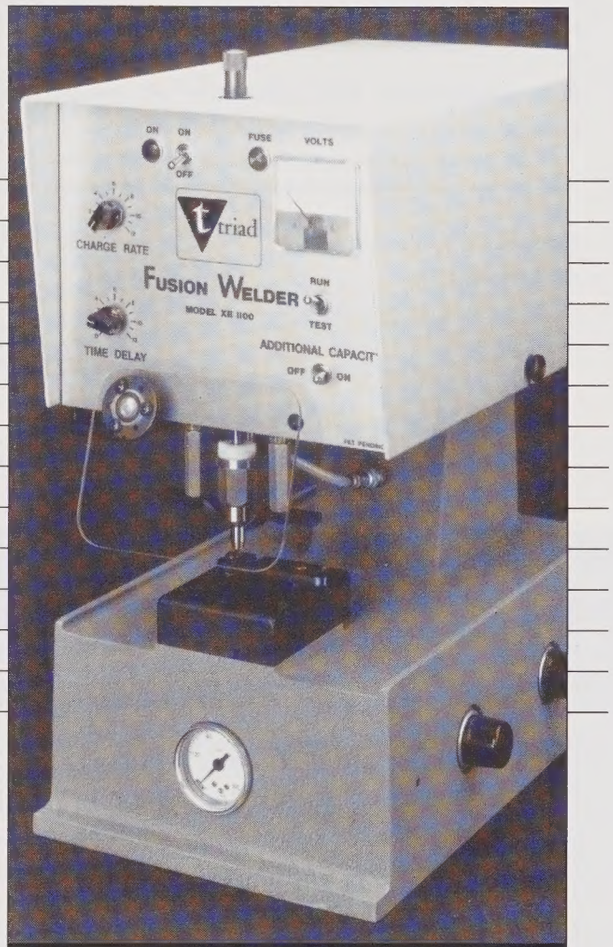

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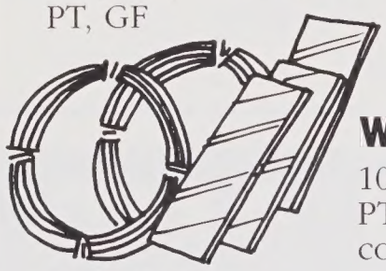

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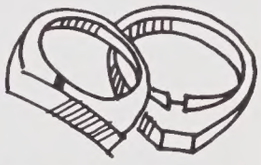

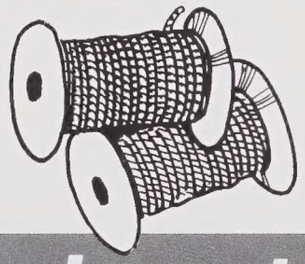

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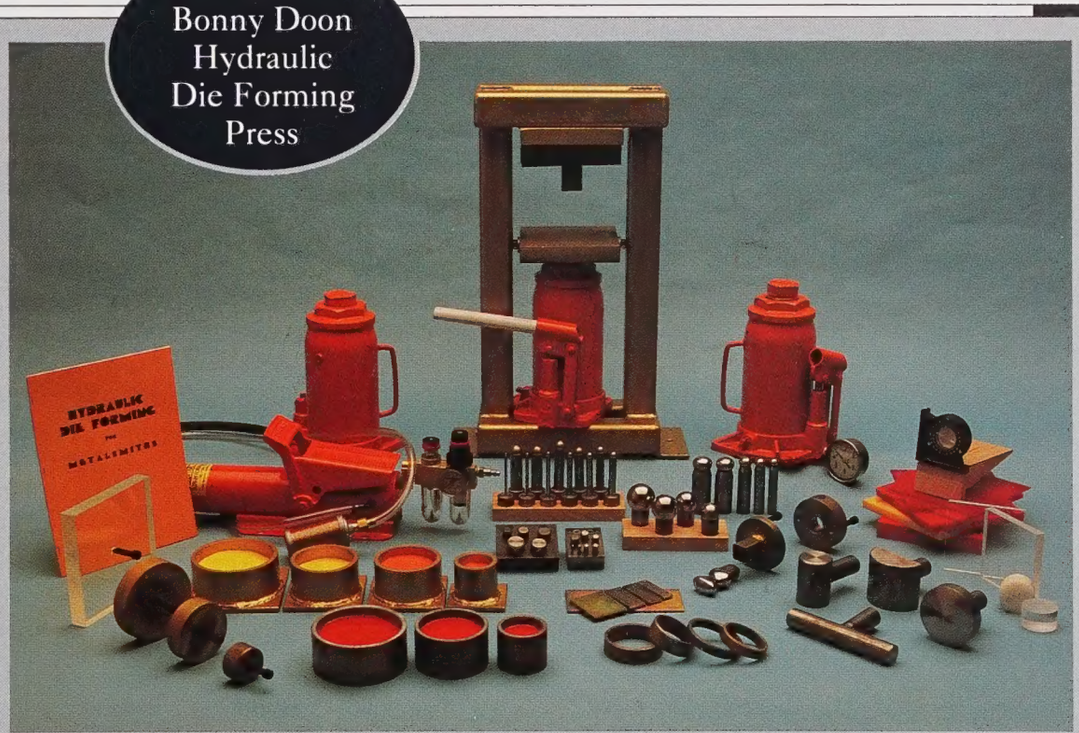

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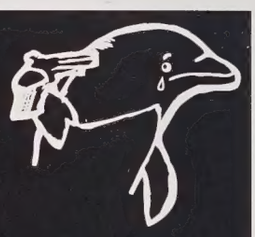

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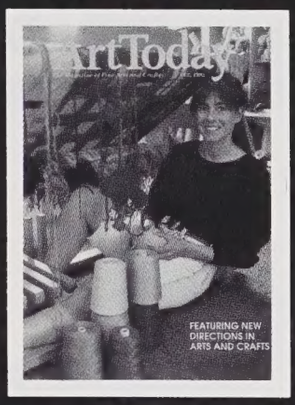

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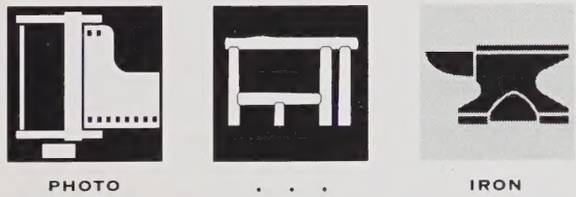

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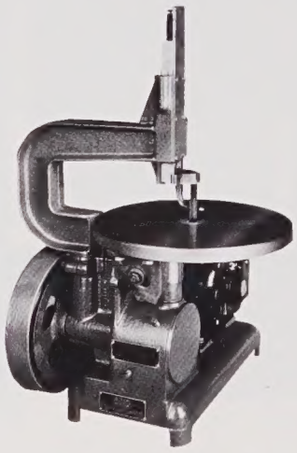

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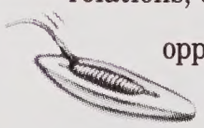

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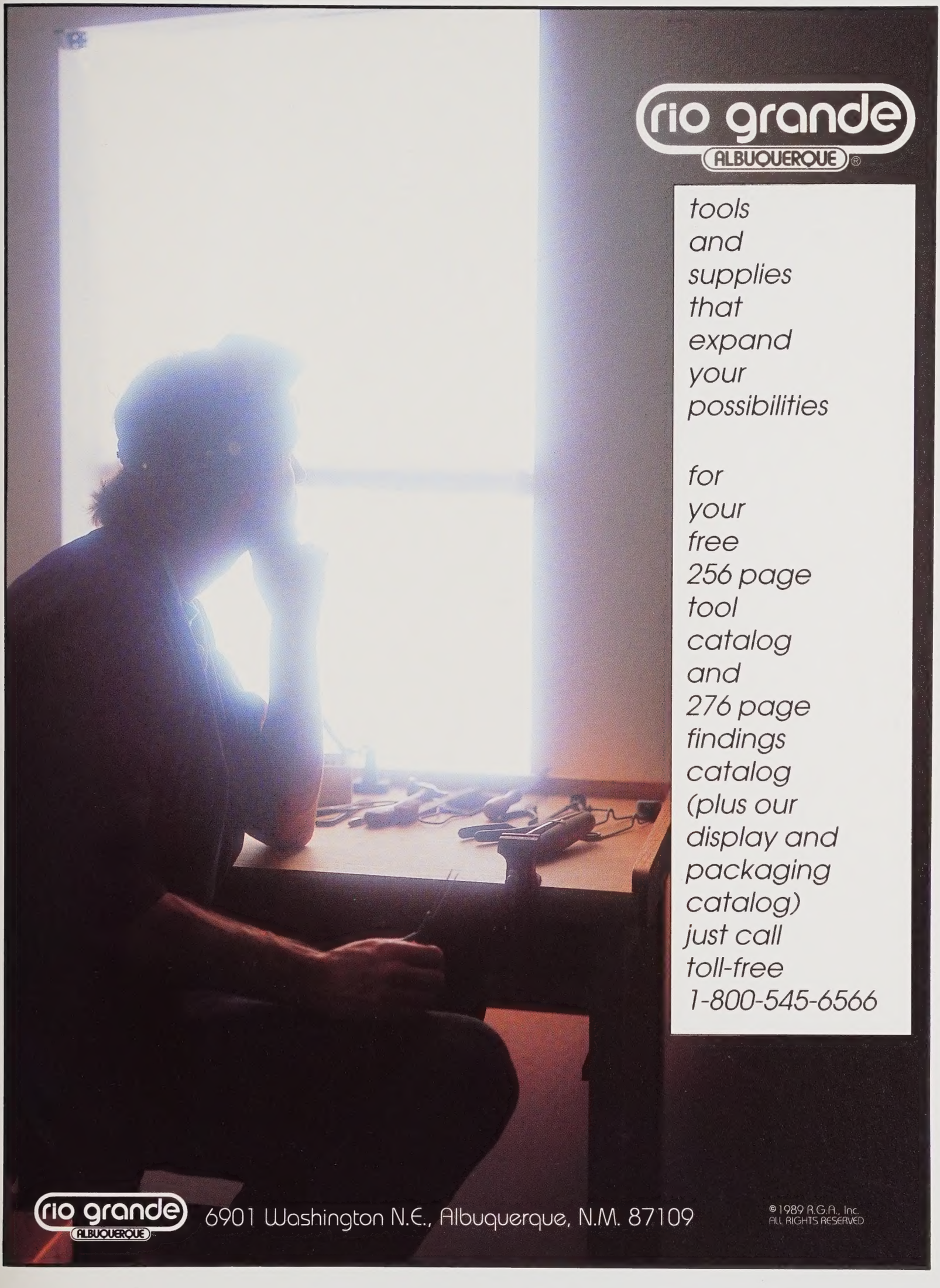

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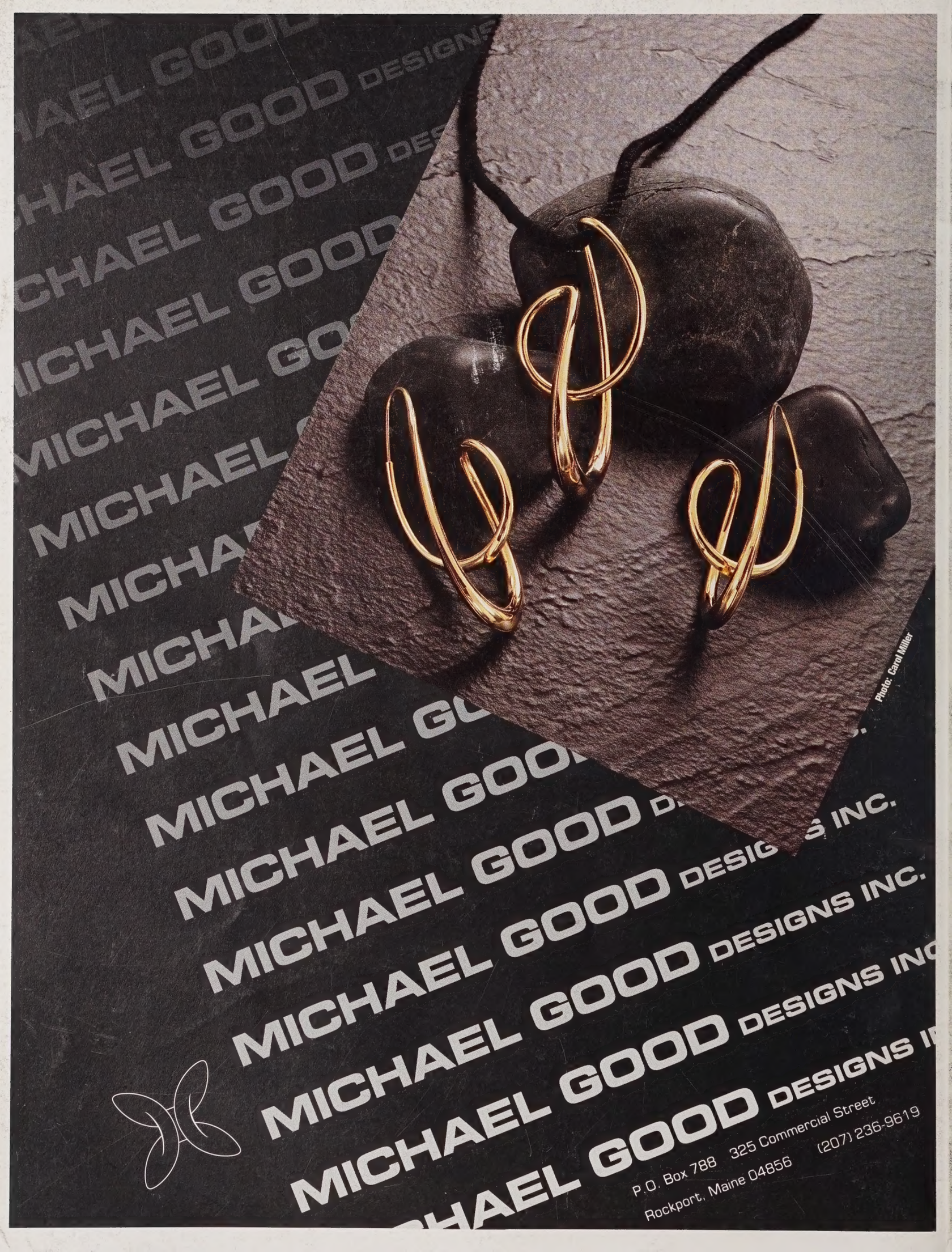
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